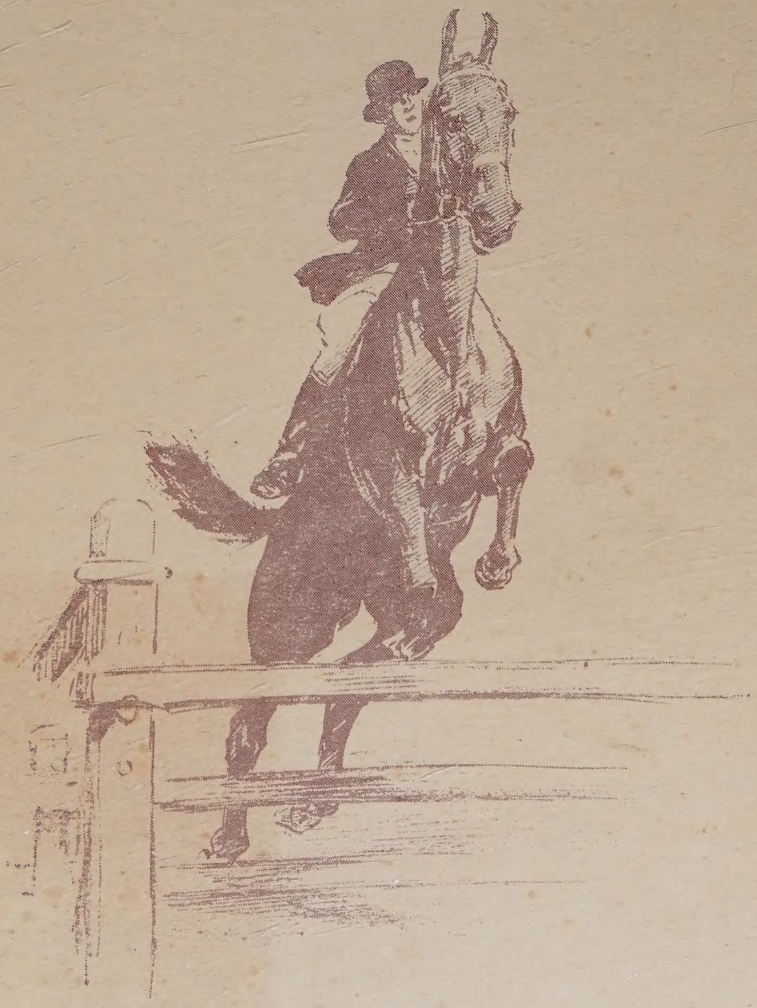
BRONCHO



BRONCHO

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BRONCHO

BY RICHARD BALL

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DEDICATED

TO HORSES OF "ALL RANKS" WHO SERVED
IN THE GREAT WAR,
ALL OF WHOM SUFFERED AND FEW
OF WHOM SURVIVED.

AMONGST THE SURVIVORS IS THE REAL

BRONCHO

WHOSE NAME HAS—IN ALL HUMILITY—BEEN GIVEN TO
THE "HERO" OF THIS FICTITIOUS TALE, SINCE IT IS TO
HIM THAT IT OWES ITS INSPIRATION

THE AUTHOR WISHES IT TO BE DISTINCTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT HE HAS DRAWN UPON IMAGINATION FOR HIS CHARACTERS. HE HAS NO MORE FOUNDED ANY HUMAN CHARACTER ON A PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL THAN HE HAS ATTEMPTED A TRUE LIFE-STORY OF THE FAMOUS OLYMPIA WINNER. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE REAL BRONCHO IS NOT GREATER THAN THAT OF MOST OTHER VISITORS TO THE INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW.

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Wanted—a Horse

Chapter the First

"IF I don't see about it myself, who's going to? Uncle Charles is always busy. It may take ages to find what I want!" So Roger Arbuthnot assured himself as he walked quickly up the hill from Thornton one September afternoon towards the pink-roofed farmstead, known as "Farquason's," which stood high above the Thornton demesne. Roger was an orphan. His parents had long been dead, and so, for the past few years, his life had alternated between Monkton's house at Dulchester during term, and Thornton during the holidays. Thornton belonged to Sir Charles Carrington, and Lady Carrington was Roger's aunt, and for the past few months, since he had left Dulchester, he had been staying with them—what Sir Charles called "knocking about." In reality he had been studying farming under the agent, the idea being that of his guardian Mr. Blickerstaffe—of Messrs. Blickerstaffe and Blickerstaffe of the Inner Temple—who had charge of that small property which would be Roger's in a few years' time.

"If you'd have him down to live with you for a little while, Lady Carrington, it would be a great kindness," he had said to Roger's aunt. "He tells me he likes the country—wouldn't care to go into business or have a profession or that sort of thing. Perhaps Sir Charles might find some way of making him useful? And he'd be getting the hang of things! He'll be his own master shortly, and until that—well, I don't feel I can do very much!"

"Why, yes!" Sir Charles had agreed, when the matter had been broached to him. "Let him knock about here for a bit. I'd like a young fellow about the place. Do us good, you and me, Isabel!"

And so Roger had started work under Saunders, the agent, and

planned for the day when he should have a farm of his own. And then, at the beginning of September, Sir Charles one day had suddenly said:

"Look here, you ought to have a horse of your own this season! Not that you can't ride some of the Hunt horses as usual!" (Sir Charles was the local M.F.H.). "But something of your own would give you more of an interest. Put it to Blickerstaffe! I'm sure he'll agree. I'll write him a note, too, if that'll do any good."

Fifty pounds was the sum which Mr. Blickerstaffe had decreed that Roger could afford for a horse. Roger had felt very much chagrined.

"I told him I shouldn't be able to find anything decent for that," he had repeated to his aunt and uncle.

Sir Charles had nodded. "It isn't much. However, *Festina lente*. We may be able to pick up something none so bad!"

But now Roger, disregarding that advice, was setting out to "see about it" for himself!

"Farquason's" was a pink-roofed farm-place high on the hill above the demesne, and Farquason had been a thorn in Sir Charles' side for many years. Small and dapper, brown-faced, brown-eyed, and latterly somewhat grizzled, he had originally come—it was rumoured—from somewhere in Scotland. But if he had none of the taciturnity of that race he had all its astuteness. He made, so it was said, a good profit on his horses. "Raw beggars!" was Sir Charles' comment. "Rushed through their breaking in less than no time. I'll be bound that a lot of them go wrong again later on!" He made profit, too, on his farming. And Mrs. Farquason did a good deal in the poultry line.

"Poisons foxes, I know it!" Sir Charles frequently declaimed. He never added that once, forgetting what he called his "position," he had taxed Farquason with the offence, and that the latter's answer had been that his horses were always too fresh to have hounds find too near home! But that had led to the comment of "Unprincipled

scoundrel! Wouldn't trust him any further than I could see him," which Lady Carrington heard so often that she knew it by heart. So, too, as a matter of fact, did Roger. And as, this September afternoon, he walked up the hill towards the farm, at the back of his mind there ran a query as to what Sir Charles, had he known of his errand, would have said. For the fact was that he was going to "Farquason's" by appointment.

Roger's life, alternating between "Aunt Isabel's" and Dulchester, had, naturally enough, brought about a certain independence, a sense of the necessity of doing things for himself; and he was now gradually coming to realise that in more than one way that sense of self-reliance had been a help to him. The mile at the school sports, for instance! If *he* hadn't been so determined himself to train—all very well for a fellow's housemaster to say, "Arbuthnot, you ought to go in for it!"—would he have won? The Greek History prize—if he hadn't settled down to swot, would he have got that? And this afternoon, as he made his way up the hill in the September sunlight, that sense of self-reliance was very much in evidence once more. "If I don't look about for something myself it may take ages," he told himself again. "Besides, it's not going to be easy. You can't buy much when you've only fifty pounds in your pocket."

Not that it was literally in his pocket! It was, rather, lying to his very small credit at the bank by order of his guardian, Mr. Blickerstaffe. And no sooner did Roger's thoughts come to that fifty than, as always, they went on to the regret that it wasn't a great deal more. How was he going to buy a decent horse for it? "Easily," Mr. Blickerstaffe had said. But then Mr. Blickerstaffe didn't know anything about horses—didn't know about anything, as far as Roger could see, except the law, and investments, and annuities, and playing golf on Saturdays down at Sunningdale—and Roger fancied that he himself did! Besides even Uncle Charles had said that fifty pounds was cutting it "pretty fine."

The Brown

Chapter the Second

"AFTERNOON, Mr. Roger!" He glanced up from his reverie to find Farquason hailing him, with a smile and an upward jerk of the hand, from across the hedge near the farmhouse gate. "Been out here having a look at these calves; but I dare say you'd be more interested in looking at the horses?"

Roger laughed.

"Well, yes, Mr. Farquason," he admitted, "I think I should."

Farquason climbed briskly over the stile on to the laneway.

"To be honest," he confided, "so should I, too."

Roger laughed again, thinking to himself that old Farquason was not a bad sort, despite what people said. But, as he walked slowly beside the dealer up the laneway towards the house, making replies to the other's commonplaces, he was quite oblivious of the sharp glance that came his way every now and then from old Farquason's penetrating brown eyes.

"Very glad," said Farquason, "that I didn't miss you, sir."

"Yes," Roger apologised. "I'm afraid I'm late." He didn't add that the reason of his unpunctuality was that he had waited for Sir Charles to go out, though as he walked into Farquason's yard the fact was very present in his thoughts.

Never before had he been to "Farquason's," for Sir Charles' prejudice had been proof against all enticements, and he glanced round him with the keenest interest. The dealer's yard was small and none too orderly, but across every open stable door there looked a head. And as Roger glanced along quickly at the chestnut, and the brown, and the bay, and on to the grey in the corner, he felt a certain glow of pride surge through his being. Many fellows he knew, when they wanted a horse, came to Farquason—and here was he now, too!

"I'm very glad, sir, to have you come up." Farquason was glancing across at him. "Sir Charles, I've asked him often if he wouldn't care to look round."

To look round! That, Roger felt, was the proper note. Of course, he had only come to look round!

"I'll be very glad to look round, Mr. Farquason," he said. But something other was telling him that he didn't want to "look round," he wanted to buy—to change the money in his pocket for that horse of whom he had so often dreamed! Ever since that surprising moment when Sir Charles had said, "I'll keep the horse here for you free if you can get Blickerstaffe to put up the price," he had been conscious of the longing for possession. To have a horse of one's own! In daydream after daydream he had imagined just the type of horse he would like to have—but something very cold and practical came now to tell him that that type of horse could never be bought for a mere fifty pounds. Yet following, renewing his confidence, urging him on, came the reflection that lots of fellows, fellows who went well, good fellows like Jimmy Smith and Jerry Thompson, had often come to Farquason's when they wanted a horse.

"There's the grey, sir; Silver Stream I call him," said Farquason at his elbow. "Perhaps you'd care to see him out?"

"Yes, rather, Mr. Farquason!" The potential purchaser in Roger was uppermost once more!

But as the grey jogged the length of the yard and back behind Mr. Farquason's "George"; as "George"—cute old dealer's man that he was!—slapped him on the neck and said, "Quiet as a lamb, sir"—touching his cap and beaming at Roger; as Farquason himself, walking a pace or two onward, added, "Nice type of horse, Mr. Roger. Strong for you, perhaps, but a nice type. Five off and sure to improve"—Roger knew that the grey was not the horse for him. He lacked quality and spirit. There was something craven about those great sagging ears and something common about that head!

"Or, Mr. Roger, there's the mare in Box Number Three. Lady

Kitty, I call her. She's a quality type if you will." Farquason turned. "Pull Lady Kitty out, George."

George pulled the bay mare out. He jogged her up and down the yard, and then, standing silent at her head, awaited Roger's inspection.

Farquason, moving slowly round, continued his comment.

"Pretty clean bred, I must say. Bought her just this time last year. Never been a day sick or sorry since."

But Roger, as he followed, was thinking to himself, "Don't like those hocks! Long of her back, too! Sir Charles always says that a long-backed horse is a good horse. But you must have well-turned hocks! Wonder what Farquason wants, though—not that I like her!"

"How much are you asking for her, Mr. Farquason?" he asked aloud.

"Two hundred, sir," answered Farquason.

Roger drew a deep breath. Two hundred pounds for Lady Kitty! What, then, would be the price of such a horse as he would like to own? Aloud he said slowly:

"Oh, I'm afraid that would be too much for me. I can only buy something cheap, you know."

"Just so, sir," said Farquason. "There's the chestnut in Number Five."

They had the chestnut out. They saw her jog up and down. George, at his master's suggestion, "clapped" a saddle on her and cantered her round the paddock.

"Here you are, sir," he said, pulling up breathlessly in front of Roger when he returned. "Try her yourself. Try her across the bush fence down at the end. She's just the sort to suit you. Carry you to hounds first rate."

"Yes, Mr. Roger," added Farquason. "Try her."

"I don't think I care about her," said Roger, dubiously.

"You will when you're on her."

"She hops the bushes," George supplemented, "like a bird."

Somewhat loth Roger swung himself into the saddle. Still more loth he cantered the chestnut up and down. In obedience to George's desire, he hustled her over the bush fence. But with every stride there grew deeper within him the conviction that this wasn't what he wanted at all, that none of them were! He wanted a horse he could be proud of. The chestnut was slow, plain, underbred. And what did Farquason want for her?—a hundred pounds!

"Haven't you anything else?" he asked disappointedly.

"There are three-year-olds and four-year-olds, sir."

They looked at them, shaggy youngsters, being hurriedly broken, who obviously would not suit. Roger remembered what Sir Charles had said about that breaking.

"Buy 'em when I can," explained Farquason. "But they give a lot of trouble. Not much use to you yet, sir, any of 'em?"

And it was not until they were turning out of the yard again that Roger thought of something further that Sir Charles had said about "Farquason's." What was it? Something about a horse that had given trouble; a horse that had been seen making an exhibition of himself by Harry, Sir Charles's stableman.

"Have you still," he asked, "the horse that somebody told me fell back with George?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Farquason, drily, "he's here still."

"If you don't mind," Roger heard himself saying, "I'd rather like to see him."

"Why, yes, sir," said Farquason, turning back again, "but you'll have to come down this way."

They passed through the yard, and on to an even less orderly range of buildings, calves in one, pigs in another and down at the end a makeshift stable with no window and a rickety door.

"I'm afraid," Roger apologised, "that I'm giving you a lot of trouble."

"No trouble at all, sir. No trouble at all! Difficult horse, this,

sir, but we're getting him to rights nicely. . . . Put a bridle on the brown horse, George."

"Yes, sir," said George, disappearing into the stable. Roger followed for a pace or two. Pitch black it looked inside—and hadn't been cleaned out for weeks, possibly months! A wave of foul air came through the open door, and with it came snortings and plungings of terrified surprise and the loud protesting voice of George. "Stand still, you brute!" he shouted. "Well, if you won't, take that . . . and that . . . and that! . . . Ha! Got you! . . . . Hi, come over there, now!"

And a moment later the brown horse, with a clatter of hoofs, came blinking out into the sunlight.

"Whoa, there, stand still!" shouted George, giving a final chuck at his mouth.

And suddenly, as he stood there, Roger felt his heart leap, leap in a twofold manner with appreciation and loathing. For beneath the rough, uncared-for coat and the sullen, hangdog expression, he saw, growing to life before his eyes in the dealer's yard, the very horse of his dreams.

"Power," he murmured beneath his breath; "and absolutely *full* of quality! Courage, too! But what on earth have the brutes been doing with him?" And as he walked slowly round, noting the way the ribs showed beneath the matted coat, the weak neck and the prominent hip-bones, a new loathing of Farquason and George and all their doings rose within him to a pitch greater than ever had been even Sir Charles'. "Been ill-treating you, old man, I'll be bound!" he said vehemently beneath his breath. But as he put out his hand to touch the horse's shoulder the creature swung away from him as though he had been struck.

"Behave, will you!" shouted George, with another chuck at the bridle.

"Funny tempered horse," repeated Farquason to Roger's unresponsive back.

Roger was gazing at the horse. Not a spot of white upon him! He was brown all over save for a patch of tan upon his muzzle. And what shape, what quality, what shoulders and back, and loins, and legs! All the love and knowledge of a horse that was within him, all that inheritance that had come to him from his long-dead father, of whose horsemanship men still talked, such scraps of advice and experience as he had casually gathered through Sir Charles, and old Stanley the stud-groom, and the stablemen, all that rose up within him now to tell him that this was the horse he had been looking for. And something other came also, something that urged that, cost what it might, out of Farquason's vile hands that horse must come!

Hiding his feelings he slowly began:

"Mr. Farquason, what would you want for this horse?"

"He's not exactly what I'd recommend you, sir," answered Farquason, with reluctance.

"Still, what would you want for him?"

"Oh," said Farquason, hesitating. "Oh, I suppose a hundred pounds."

Roger paused.

"Nothing less?"

The other shook his head.

"No, sir."

Roger paused again, his gaze moving back to that strength of limb, that well-bred forehead, and on, into the future, to the sheen which he felt he could one day bring to that matted, unkempt coat. Then suddenly he turned.

"Could I see a saddle on him? I'd like to try him round the paddock if I might."

But deep as had been Farquason's reluctance hitherto, at the suggestion of saddling it increased.

"He's not the horse I'd recommend you, Mr. Roger," he said. "He's a very funny-tempered horse."

"So I understand," said Roger.

"George there, he stood up and fell back on top of him only the week before last."

"Have to give him a good hiding to get any good of him," George added. "Have to treat this one rough, sir; so you have!"

Roger nodded.

"Still, I'd like to try him." And beneath his breath he was adding, "I'll buy him. I won't leave him here with these brutes, if I have to sell the coat off my back!"

"Bring him out, please, Mr. Farquason," he called, walking towards the paddock gate.

A few minutes later the brown horse followed, George walking ruefully at his head.

"Here, George," said Farquason, with a sort of desperate joviality, "I'll give you a leg up."

Roger turned.

"No, Mr. Farquason. I want to try him myself."

Farquason hesitated. "I don't know what Sir Charles would say to me, sir. . . ."

"He'll say nothing," said Roger shortly. "Here, throw me up, George."

The next minute he had jumped on to the brown horse's back. The brown horse stood stock still.

Quietly Roger found his irons. He glanced down carefully at his girths. He caught a shorter hold of the reins and gripped his knees into the saddle. The horse stood rigid beneath him. Not so much as a muscle moved. Then Roger bent slightly forward and began to whisper towards the shapely ear:

"Now, then, old fellow, what about it?" And very gently he touched the rigid flank with his heel. Back went the ears! Even more rigid grew the taut body.

"What about it, what about walking on?" he murmured again, and touched the other flank with his other heel. The next moment the sunlit paddock seemed to give one heave up towards him. The follow-

"What about it, what about walking on?"

ing one it was stationary again, and he was once more back in the saddle, gazing at those laid-back ears.

"He gives a plunge like that at any moment, sir," explained George, coming forward.

"He's not to be trusted, Mr. Roger," added Farquason, coming forward. "I'd like to see you off him; so I would."

Roger pretended not to hear them. It was not that his heart was not beating faster, that there was not a funny feeling somewhere that was not unlike being afraid; but with the sound of their voices had come the conquering thought of what "those brutes" were doing, of what they had done, of all that beauty and strength and courage beneath him that they had reduced to a mass of jangled nerves! He gripped the saddle afresh and clenched his teeth.

"Now then, old man!" he murmured, and touched the rigid flank.

Three times more the brown horse gave that sudden, standing plunge and came to earth again with ears laid back and forefeet planted stubbornly out in front of him. The fourth, and he was charging off down the paddock, with Roger gripping breathlessly to saddle and rein. Of a sudden the sunlit afternoon had fled from before his eyes. The bent brown neck, the mane that came floating back into his face, the laid-back ears, the sullen, flashing eyes, the drive of those powerful quarters beneath him, those were the things that now made up his world. And amidst them, fighting for the mastery, struggled the brown horse's will and his!

It was now, Roger knew, or never. He must sit on! He must! If he were once to let himself be thrown the horse would be quick to recognise his victory and to remember it. If he were to save him from this life of abuse he must win this first round of the struggle. And with this thought burning in his brain he gripped hard with hands and knees as the horse plunged madly on.

The grass of the paddock flew beneath the thundering hoofs. Now they were racing down to one end, now turning back to the other. Now it was the line of rails that flashed before Roger's eyes, now the

brick wall of the stables, now Farquason or George, or both of them, gesticulating and shouting—what, he could not hear; for there was no sound in his ears save a mingled thudding of hoofs and his own panting breaths. Shorter and shorter came the latter. Deeper and deeper they grew. A strange numbness seemed to be creeping slowly upon him as the minutes passed; into his hands, his knees, every recess of his being. Greater and greater grew the fear that he would be beaten. And then, of a sudden, just as he had come to feel that his endurance was at an end, a deep shiver shook the horse's frame, and then another and another. The next moment he was standing in the centre of the paddock, with pulsing nostrils and heaving flanks. Very quietly Roger loosened a hand from the reins and ran it down along the sweat-drenched shoulder.

"No need for all that, old man," he whispered, while shiver after shiver ran through the horse's spent frame. And then, with a glow of pride in his flushed face, he glanced up again to see Farquason and George running towards him.

With an effort Farquason found his voice.

"Mr. Roger . . ." he began.

But Roger's thoughts were with the horse, with those laboured breaths, those fearful tremblings. And then he suddenly heard himself saying—while something within him declared that he would sell everything he possessed, if necessary, to do it:

"Look here, Mr. Farquason, I'll give you your hundred pounds."

Farquason's jaw dropped.

"Very good, sir," he said. "I'll send down George with him."

But Roger shook his head. Never again should the brutes touch him!

"You can take back your saddle and bridle," he said, "I'll ride him down myself."

Half an hour later he rode slowly into the Thornton stable yard. Old Stanley, the stud-groom, was standing in its centre, and, talking

to him, Roger saw, was Sir Charles. But in his new mood he felt he did not care.

"What's this you have?" asked Sir Charles, looking up at him.

"Farquason's horse," Roger answered.

"What are you doing with him?"

"I've just bought him, Uncle Charles."

"Bless my soul!" said Sir Charles, and turned back in abrupt silence towards the house.

The Height of Foolishness

Chapter the Third

"WHAT do you think he's done now, my dear?" Sir Charles grumbled, meeting his wife's glance as he came into the room.

Lady Carrington sighed. *He,* she knew, meant Roger; and she knew also that whatever he had done would be put forth by her husband as another instance of the Arbuthnot impetuosity.

"Gone and bought that spoiled brute of Farquason's," continued Sir Charles, sitting heavily down. "You know, the horse I told you I saw falling back with the groom the other day. If he doesn't kill him he'll be selling him again for a fiver very soon—and he paid a cool hundred pounds!"

The pronouns might be mixed, but to Lady Carrington the sense seemed obvious. It was Roger who would be killed—or who would be selling very soon for the fiver. Under the influence of that prophecy she did what she knew to be a foolish thing. She glanced up at her husband and asked "Why?"

The query gave Sir Charles his awaited cue.

"Why, my dear, why? Don't ask me that! I can't tell you. But if you want my opinion, Roger's like the rest of your people, doesn't know he's going to do a thing until it's done!"

Lady Carrington sought refuge in silence. It was her own opinion, though for twenty years of married life she had been almost daily accused of impetuosity, that she always knew perfectly well what she was going to do. And so also, she fancied, did Roger.

"The absolute height of foolishness," Sir Charles was continuing. "Madness, I call it; stark madness! Why, I had two or three in view that would have suited him first rate!"

Lady Carrington nodded.

'Yes, I know you had."

Of course, in his own way, she told herself, Charles was very fond of the boy! And it was really very silly of Roger to have gone out and spent all that money so rashly without waiting for his uncle's advice.

Her unspoken thought seemed to have echoed in Sir Charles' brain, for his next sentence was:

"If it hadn't been hard enough, you know, to get that fifty out of Blickerstaffe! I backed Roger up all I could. I believe in every young fellow havin' a horse of his own—not that he couldn't ride one of mine when he wanted to! But now that he's gone and thrown it all away right off—and as much more along with it, though where that's to come from I'm sure I can't tell!—he may whistle for anything further."

Once more Lady Carrington nodded wisely. What Charles said about Mr. Blickerstaffe was, she knew, quite true.

And it certainly did look, she admitted privately, very like the Arbuthnot impetuosity, going off by himself and spending every penny —perhaps even more than he had, she conjectured—on an animal Sir Charles said he would never be able to ride!

"Never as much as a word to me," Sir Charles grumbled, with what he felt to be every justification. "The cheek of Farquason, too, asking him so much! They could do nothing with the horse, you know, absolutely nothing! If I'd bid him five-and-twenty myself he'd have taken it like a shot. A perfect scandal, salting the young fellow like that, and so I'd much like to tell him—only in my position, my dear, I can't afford to be rude."

Very often, in these fireside talks, Sir Charles exploited that maxim —but it was one which, at the covertside, he frequently forgot!

Lady Carrington sighed.

"I hope the boy won't get hurt," she said. "I depend on you, Charles, to see to it."

Sir Charles grunted.

"Do my best, my dear; do my best! But I must give him a bit of a talking to. Can't make out what possessed him! And I can't think it could be just being cocksure."

"Cocksure! Oh no!" Lady Carrington was certain it wasn't. Roger wasn't that sort at all! And then she remembered that the other day, when he had been helping her in the garden, he'd said something about having heard that Farquason had a very fine horse who was being dreadfully ill-treated!

A Good Beginning

Chapter the Fourth

ROGER was out early the next morning. He met old Stanley coming towards him across the yard.

"That horse of yours, sir," the old man began. "Very difficult horse in the stable he seems to be. Harry tells me he can't get near him."

Roger was feeling worried. Sir Charles had spent the previous evening in calling him several sorts of fool.

"That's all right, Stanley," he said shortly. "I'm going to look after him myself."

Old Stanley shook his head.

"Bad bargain, that!" he murmured as Roger walked away. "Be giving him away before the end of the month, I reckon."

Such, too, had been the substance of Sir Charles' prophesying overnight. Even Lady Carrington had asked quietly, "Roger, what made you buy him? He'll be a terribly troublesome horse." And Roger had felt it was useless to try to explain either that loathing he had felt for Farquason, or his belief that with patience the horse could be redeemed.

The stableman was standing at the door of the box.

"You can leave him to me, Harry, this morning," Roger said.

Harry touched his cap in confusion.

"Very bad-tempered horse, Mr. Roger, sir, he seems. Lash out at you, so he would! I never as much as got my hand on him. I wonder what they did to him up at 'Farquason's'? Shouldn't wonder if he got abuse."

"A lot of it, I think," said Roger. "But I don't want you to waste your time. I'll see what I can make of him."

"I left the hay on the ground, sir," said Harry, turning slowly away. "Daren't go up to put it in the manger."

Roger nodded.

"So I see. It will do very well."

"And, Mr. Roger"—Harry was closing the door—"if you want me just give a call. I'll be up in the grey mare's stable."

Suddenly Roger realised the other's fellow-feeling, the first sympathy that had come his way since his purchase.

"Good sort, Harry!" he said to himself as the sound of the stableman's boots died away upon the paving. Then he turned towards the horse.

The brown was standing sullenly in the furthest corner of the box, his tail between his legs, his head resting unresponsively upon the manger.

"Poor old man," Roger began aloud, slowly moving towards him. Back went the pointed ears, but not another muscle moved. "Poor old man!" he repeated, drawing, very slowly, closer. The horse's eye was on him, and, as he noted the wide, fear-stricken gaze, all the advice he had ever had came rushing through his brain. "Be as quiet as you can, and as gentle. . . . Above all, never let them think you are afraid!" "Poor old man!" he murmured once again, creeping forward with outstretched hand. "Poor old man, what did they do to you . . . what?" Nearer and nearer he crept, almost up to the shoulder, his fingers ready outstretched to stroke the matted, unkempt coat. But at the last moment the horse plunged backward with a snort of terror, and the next was cowering against the door. Again Roger tried, and again. Each time, at the last moment, the horse eluded him—to huddle cowering in the opposite corner. But at length there came a moment when Roger's fingers touched the sweat-crusted coat, while shiver after shiver ran through the horse's frame.

"Poor old fellow!" he murmured. "I shan't do anything to you. No!"—the while his fingers ran ever so gently over the matted hair. The horse backed against the wall, watching him with terror-stricken eyes, small beads of perspiration rising on his velvet

At the last moment - the horse plunged backward with a snort of terror

muzzle, his ears pricking uncertainly to the murmured assurances. ". . . Shan't do anything to you—ever! Remember that!" The murmured encouragement trickled on while the gentle fingers ran, ever so lightly, over the unkempt shoulder and ragged neck. At length they ceased. And as Roger stepped back a pace there was triumph in his eyes, just such triumph as there had been the day before at "Farquason's." "That's the first lesson, old man," he murmured, with a final gentle stroke. "If I stay longer I'll be late for breakfast, but I'm coming back again."

And as he hurried across the yard towards the house Harry watched him from the grey mare's box with admiring eyes.

Half an hour later he was back again. The horse had been cropping his hay, between intervals of anxious staring through the window; but at the sound of footsteps he had moved away again, and Roger found him cowering once more against the further wall.

"Well," he queried, letting himself quietly in, "had some breakfast, too? Now for a little grooming! And then, you and I, we've got, you know, to go out!"

"Mr. Roger!" It was Harry's broad, smiling face that looked across the closed lower half of the door. "If you want anything I'll be just hereabouts. How did you get on, sir, before?"

"Got my hand on him," said Roger. "That's something, isn't it? I want to give him a little dressing now. They saddled him yesterday at 'Farquason's,' but I don't want to have to do anything rough."

"Yes, sir! No, sir!" Harry spoke briskly. "I'll get you a dandy brush and a wad."

"A rope, too," said Roger. "I'd like to have something to slip across his neck."

And while he began once more to murmur assurances to the horse, he crept slowly forward with outstretched hand so that his fingers were once again stroking that unkempt shoulder; he questioned himself as to how he had come by such knowledge as seemed to be

his instinctively now. From the many hours spent with old Stanley in the stable yard? From dim memories of holidays with his father long ago? From chance experience? Or was it all mere instinct, such instinct as now told him that this was the horse of his dreams?

Harry came back quickly with the rope. Roger felt the horse shrink from beneath his hand as the other came round the corner of the door.

"Quietly, Harry," he murmured, his eye on the horse. "Poor old man, Harry's not going to hurt you either, you know!"

"I've got the wad and the brush in my pocket, sir," Harry whispered. "Gentle, sir! Take him gentle! Keep the rope low!"

"Poor old fellow!" Roger's fingers were now working upwards, running over the tangled mane. "In a fair way to spoil you thoroughly, weren't they? How did it begin, with Farquason or before you came to him? Most likely that, I should say!"

"Yes, sir! Leastways, so I heard, sir." Harry became a mine of whispered information. "Mr. Farquason bought him from a man who bought him from somebody in Ireland. Bought him cheap, too, Mr. Farquason did, because the man couldn't do nothing with him. Said all he wanted was a few good hidings—leastways that was what George gave out. But, well, they couldn't do nothing with him neither—neither Mr. Farquason nor George!"

"Because they tried to give him those few hidings!" said Roger bitterly.

"Yes, sir. So I dare say. Quietly seems to be doing it now, I must say, sir. When I came into the box this morning I says to myself, 'Well, here's a vicious one if ever there was!'"

Roger laughed softly.

"Now the rope! Just the end of it. Keep it low. Come a step closer." And the next moment his right hand, the rope end grasped between thumb and finger, was once again very slowly stroking its way up the horse's shoulder. Right up to the neck it crept. There was a moment's pause, and then a few inches of coiled rope trickled

down the further shoulder. With a shiver of fear the horse went back against the wall, but he did not move from where he was standing, and very quietly Roger's hand crept down again and gathered the loose end and made it fast.

"Well, that's that!" he said, stepping back a pace. And Harry, behind him, gave an audible sigh of relief.

"Here is the brush, sir, and here's the wad! Shall you hold him, sir, and shall I try to do him down a bit?"

Roger shook his head.

"No, you hold him and I'll try. He knows me best. I don't want to clean him. Not that I shouldn't like to! I just want to get him used to us a bit." And then, very lightly, he began to run the brush over that matted coat.

A shaft of sunlight came glancing in through the stable window, and in it the dust rose and fell as Roger groomed quietly on.

"My!" exclaimed Harry, "isn't he in a state, though! That horse won't be clean, Mr. Roger, sir, no, not for months!"

"Not till we get his confidence and can feed him well," answered Roger. "Farquason must have starved him. His coat's as dry as a bone."

"Yes, sir," agreed Harry. "He wants lots of care. And, my, if he comes right, won't he just be a horse, sir! Leave all our lot here standing still, sir; so he ought!"

Roger looked round with a smile.

"If he comes right! And I feel that he will. And I feel that you'll look after him well for me, too!"

"Wouldn't I just love to, sir," Harry beamed. "Why, he might win us a race at the point-to-point!"

The Bucking Broncho

Chapter the Fifth

TEN minutes later that morning Roger was leading his horse out into the sunlight.

"I shan't ride him to-day," he told Harry. "I just want him to grow a little more used to me first. I'll walk him about for an hour and he can pick some grass in the orchard. I can talk to him and that sort of thing."

But if the sunlight was welcoming it was also cruel. It showed up all too clearly the brown horse's poverty, his rough, staring coat, his woe-begone expression.

"But we'll soon see the last of that, old man!" Roger comforted himself. "A few weeks' good oats, a few weeks' mashing, a few weeks of regular exercise. . . ." And he glanced once more at the line of ear and shoulder and rib and loin, and thought what a champion he might one day own. He felt no regret for his impulse, for his purchase—though the problem of paying that hundred pounds remained still to be solved! There was, of course, Blickerstaffe's fifty. And that new gun he had been going to get himself—he could give up that! And his riding coat—well, the old one must just last another season! And so, he thought, with one thing and another, he could just manage it. Standing there in the orchard, with the horse cropping ravenously at the grass at his feet, he assured himself that he could.

He was still there, thinking it out, when he heard a voice behind him, that of his aunt.

"At last, Roger," she began, "I've found you! So this is your horse?"

He nodded.

"Poor creature!" said Lady Carrington softly. "I do hope he'll

do well with you. He certainly looks as though he's had an awful time."

"He's begun ever so well!" Roger told her enthusiastically. "We could scarcely touch him this morning, and, look—he'll let me run my hand right up to his ears now."

Lady Carrington nodded. She watched the horse, after a snort or two of protest, submitting to have his ears rubbed.

"When he gets strong again," she said, "he'll be a beautiful creature. He reminds me of the horses your father used to have, Roger. But what I came to say is this, don't worry too much about what Uncle Charles said last night. He only doesn't want you to lose your money or hurt yourself, you know. And as to that other fifty pounds, I could help you if you would let me. I could give it to you easily, Roger, you know."

Something suddenly stuck in Roger's throat. For a moment everything seemed to blur, and he looked at the world through shadowed eyes.

"Oh, Aunt Isabel," he heard himself exclaiming in surprise, "it's most awfully good of you! But I couldn't take it! Honestly, no!"

"Roger, dear, you know it won't make much difference to me."

But he shook his head.

"I couldn't. You and Uncle Charles are far too kind to me as it is. Besides," he explained, "I want to give up something. When I saw how those brutes were treating him I felt it would be well worth giving up a good deal to get him right again."

Lady Carrington nodded quickly.

"I see. Still, if you find it hard, remember." She turned away quickly. The boy was just like his father, she told herself as she went.

Roger was still in the orchard, talking to the horse, running his hand along his neck and shoulder and trying to make friends, when once more he heard a voice behind him, the high, childish voice of his young cousin Marjorie.

"Oh, Roger!" she called. "I've been looking for you everywhere—the stables, the farmyard—everywhere! Then I thought you might have gone out riding. I wanted to see your new horse."

He laughed at her.

"Well, here he is, old girl!"

She danced forward, all long black stockings and flying pigtails and cotton frock.

"Steady!" he called. They were good friends despite the difference in their ages. "Don't dash!"

Sobered, Marjorie came on more sedately. Standing beside Roger, she took one good long stare at the brown.

"Is *that* your idea of a horse?" she asked slowly. "That awful thing!" Then she flashed round. "Why, he's dreadful! and filthy! and so thin that you can almost see his inside! If you want a name for him, 'Scarecrow' wouldn't be bad, or what about 'Rags and Bones'?"

"Little you know!" growled Roger, glancing to where, ten yards away, she, smiling impishly, stood upon one leg.

"Well, all I can say," she flashed back at him before she finally sped on, "is that I didn't know you were really *such* an ass!"

He glanced after her with a feeling of dismay. She was only a kid! Still . . . ? And once more he renewed his resolve to show "all of them"—Sir Charles, old Stanley, "all of them"—that he was right and they were wrong!

But sometimes, as the weeks sped by, doing that did not seem destined to prove any too easy. Despite long and anxious hours spent in the stable, the brown horse was slow in what old Stanley called "coming to hand."

"That one, he knows every trick worth learning," was the old stud groom's opinion. "I don't know that you're any more than wasting your time with him, sir."

But Roger's belief in ultimate success remained unshaken, and he had Harry's good-humoured admiration to back him up. And at

last came the day when he finally determined to put everything to the test.

"If he starts his usual tricks I'll hit him, just to show him that I can," he declared.

Stanley was standing by when Harry led the brown horse out into the yard.

"Quietly now, sir," came the old man's advice as he lifted Roger into the saddle. "Take him as quietly as you can."

Roger nodded, finding his irons and gripping his knees. Then, with one hand stroking the horse's shoulder, he nodded to Harry,

"Just walk him on."

"Come, walk on, horse," said Harry, his hand upon the bridle.

But, as usual, at the first hint of pressure back went the horse's ears. White flashed the gleam of his eye.

"Come," repeated Harry, "walk on."

At the first pull upon the bridle the horse reared up suddenly, and then dropped back on to all fours again as stolidly as a stone.

"Ill-tempered horse," said old Stanley, and tried to hunt him on from behind; but the horse refused to budge, lashing out with his hind feet and planting his fore firmly on the ground.

Very gently Roger pressed his heels to the rigid flanks, to be met by laid-back ears and flashing eyes. Once, twice, thrice again he tried, but with no better result. Then came the moment. Gripping his knees anew he spoke in a different voice.

"Now, then," he said, "you've got to!" And he tipped the horse smartly on the shoulder with his stick.

The result was one tremendous heave of the powerful quarters, one wild onward plunge that scattered Harry and Stanley to right and to left; and the next moment the horse was dashing madly down the yard, his hoofs drawing fire from the cobbles as he went. Out through the wide open gateway he plunged, and turned out of sight down the winding roadway towards the farm.

"Be killed, so he will!" old Stanley panted, hurrying behind

Harry towards the gate. But when they got there, there was nothing to be seen save a cloud of dust that hung round the bend of the farmyard road.

All his lifetime Roger remembered that ride. His knee missed the stone pier of the gate by inches. There was a waggon coming along the road from the farm—he missed it by inches, too! But, as luck would have it, the gate into the big field behind the garden was open, and it was into that that the horse dashed in his wild career. Round and round he tore, foam flying from his mouth, his breath panting out through distended nostrils. But at last, when his being had grown so numb that he felt he could scarcely cling on any longer, the frenzied plungings gradually ceased, the headlong gallop became slower and slower, and eventually, with a deep feeling of relief, he steadied the horse into a trot. Then, with his hand stroking the sweat-soaked shoulder, he bent low.

"Old man," he murmured, "you mustn't. There isn't any need. I shan't ever ill-treat you. But you've got to do what I want!" And the horse answered with deep tremblings and loud snorts of surprise.

Roger eased him to a walk, and gradually the panting breaths became less laboured. At the end of the field he urged him into a trot again, and the horse responded instantly to his call. He slowed to a walk again. He urged him on once more. Each time the horse answered instantly to the pressure of his leg. And so, in a mood of triumph, he came riding quietly back, beneath the shadow of the high, old garden wall.

It was just then that, with sudden unexpectedness, a voice hailed him from above his head, and, looking up, he caught sight of Marjorie. Her pigtails dangled over the wall. So, too, did her long black-stockinged legs. But there was now none of that mockery in her tone which had been so noticeable on the day when she had laughed at him in the orchard.

"Jolly good performance!" she shouted.

With sudden unexpectedness, a voice hailed him from above

"Performance?" he questioned, with a smile.

"Yes. I was *sure* I'd see you going, but I didn't!"

"That," shouted Roger back at her, "was just as well."

"Talk of the bucking Bronchos! If you still want a name for him, what about that?"

"Right, old girl," answered Roger. "That'll do first rate."

Then he touched the horse with his heel.

"Come along, Broncho!" And turning in his saddle he laughed back at her as he rode away, "But there won't be any further performances!"

The Pack in Danger

Chapter the Sixth

"ALL I ask, Roger," said Sir Charles, with jovial sarcasm, "is that you don't ride on top of my hounds."

"Right you are, Uncle Charles," answered Roger, laughing. "Up to this, as you know, I've always been nearer the tail end."

"So you think it's high time to adventure further?" Sir Charles gazed abstractedly at the ceiling, above the smoke of his after-dinner cigar. "I suppose that's why you are taking Broncho to Meadsbrook?"

Roger nodded.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I'd like to give him a day in the good country. I think those clean big fences would help on his confidence."

"Perhaps . . .!" mused Sir Charles. "Perhaps . . .!" Then he suddenly sat upright. "My dear boy," he said vehemently, "you're giving yourself a rotten season, bothering with that brute."

"Not brute!" exclaimed Roger in hurt tones.

"Yes," repeated Sir Charles doggedly, "he's an incorrigible brute."

"He isn't!" protested Roger. "He's getting better every day. And, at any rate, I'm enjoying myself."

"Funny taste, then!" muttered his uncle to his cigar.

The fact was that Broncho's progress was still slow. He had become docile in the stable. He would walk, trot, and canter just as Roger wished, and the latter felt that at last the horse had come to trust him. Nowadays he whinnied when his master crossed the yard, and would come sniffing to the stable door for the carrot in Roger's hand. "Coming on, aren't you?" Roger often murmured with pride as he stroked the velvet muzzle. But the horse was still difficult out hunting. Three times they had lost good runs through his fault. Once

a man had taken a fall right in front of him, and Broncho had stopped dead. Once there had been loose clay on the take-off that he had refused to face. And once there had been several horses refusing a place when he had come to it, and he had lost his temper and done nothing but kick and rear.

"Yes, I know, old man," Roger had murmured, walking home by the horse's head that afternoon. "Yes, I know you're sorry for it now"—Broncho, as though in answer, rubbed his head against his master's elbow—"but it was your fault. Absolutely! I never did a thing to you—just tried to sit there! And a jolly hard job I must say you gave me for fully five minutes or more. . . . And then, when you'd got over your temper and jumped the fence, where were hounds? Out of sight! That's why we're walking home now!"

"But wait"—it was a little further on that he had sought to give comfort—"wait till you're a bit fitter and we can have a day in the better country, where it's clean and safe and there's room for everyone! Wait till Jimmy and Jerry and all the rest of them see what you can do then! Beat them on three legs, I *know* you would! And, of course, I know something must have happened to you long ago to make you nervy. Was it a fall across wire or what?" But save by a nudge of his velvet muzzle, Broncho could not answer! "Anyway, we're going to forget it. . . ."

In appearance the horse had improved out of all knowledge. Old Stanley had come round and now looked upon him with favour.

"Very high-class horse, Mr. Roger," he admitted. "Shouldn't be surprised if he were to win something good one day. Most quality horse we have in the stable. But, my, I didn't like to see you getting up on him that first day in the yard!"

And if old Stanley had "come round," Sir Charles was "coming."

"Dad hasn't got over it yet," Marjorie explained to Roger, with a grin. "But he's doing as nicely as can be expected. It looks as though it'll be one up, old thing, for you."

But neither Marjorie nor Roger knew anything of the anxious in-

terest Sir Charles had taken right from the very beginning. He had disguised it under his habitual gruffness, so much so that Marjorie had sought to explain, "Dad's pretty sick about Broncho, you know. He'd rather have bought you something mouldy for the fifty pounds." It may be added that Marjorie herself had "come round" on the day of Broncho's "performance" in the field behind the garden. Now Roger had no more fervent admirer—unless it was Harry the stable lad!

It was to old Stanley, in quiet talks in the stable yard, that Sir Charles most often disclosed his anxiety.

"Stanley, I don't want to interfere, but do you think that Mr. Roger will ever get that horse right?"

"He's a very difficult horse, Sir Charles." Old Stanley announced his opinion slowly. "But he's improving."

"Yes, yes," Sir Charles nodded, "I can see that!"

"Mr. Roger's taking him just the way he should be taken, too. Nobody could do it better, I must say."

"Yes, yes." Sir Charles nodded again. "Good boy. Lots of pluck. But I don't want to have him *hurt.*"

Old Stanley paused a moment.

"There was a time, Sir Charles, when I used to be afraid of that myself. Those first days! My word! 'We'll find him dead on the farm road!' I said to myself more than once. But somehow I don't think there's much likelihood of anything now. The horse seems to have taken to him, as you might say."

Sir Charles' eyebrows asked a question.

"I mean he never does anything wrong now except when he forgets."

"Forgets?" queried Sir Charles.

"Forgets it's Mr. Roger who's on his back. Thinks he's back again with some of the people who abused him."

That, Sir Charles remembered, was what Roger himself had told him, too!

"He's a very high-class horse, Stanley," he said, feeling soothed.

"I don't blame the boy for being anxious to have a good horse. But I don't want him to go and get smashed up."

Roger was up very early on the morning of the day that hounds were to meet at Meadsbrook, and started very early for the meet. It was a good fourteen miles away, and he had decided to take Broncho there himself. "If I start early and take him slowly," he reasoned, "then he won't feel the journey much." For, despite all the care that had been given him since he had first come into Roger's hands, old Stanley was positive that the horse had not yet recovered his full strength.

"Don't give him too long days, sir," he advised Roger. "It's little more than three months since you got him, and, remember, he was *starved!*"

Yet, that winter's morning, it was a very different looking Broncho whom Roger rode out of the stable yard; no longer the sullen, unkempt horse who had come down from "Farquason's." Now Broncho's coat shone. Now the muscle rippled under his skin. Now his step was alert and his head was held high, and his ears were pricked above a mane into whose plaiting had gone all Harry's pride. And Roger himself sat in his saddle with such erect confidence that no one ever noticed his old coat. And he himself, as Broncho walked so proudly along, decided for once and all that he was worth far more than the coat and the gun and those few other things which had been sacrificed to pay for him. Far more! His eyes glanced in anticipation across the winter landscape, at the bare, grey fields, the blue-brown lines of the hedges, the trees against the skyline on top of the hill. It was just the day for a hunt, he told himself, sniffing the mild air. Just the day to have Broncho in the good part of the country!

Roger was early, yet there were some others on the road. The first to overtake him was Mr. Farquason himself, jogging along hurriedly on an under-bred bay.

"Morning, sir!" Farquason's voice was cheerful. "Got the horse

out to-day, I see. Doing well with you? Good! Splendid!" But beneath his breath he murmured, as his keen eyes glanced at Broncho: "Fool that I was! I shouldn't have let that horse go. We ought to have got the better of him, George and I. If he's cured, if he's worth five hundred pence he's worth five hundred pounds!"

Farquason was in a hurry, and so he soon jogged on out of sight. The next to overtake Roger was old Colonel Lushington.

"Hullo! young man," he called, waving his crop. "Early to-day, both of us. I like to be early, don't you?"

Roger smiled round at the cheery voice. He had always liked old Colonel Lushington.

"I wanted to take my horse on quietly," he explained.

The Colonel reined up to a walk as he drew level. His quick, grey eyes scanned Broncho up and down.

"Oh! so that's the horse?" he said. "*I've* heard some stories about him. The bucking Broncho, eh? But he's going on well with you now, they tell me? Nothing like trying a thing out, eh?"

"He couldn't do better," answered Roger with enthusiasm.

"That's right! That's right!" said the Colonel jovially. "Very fine-looking horse, too!"

Then behind them came the sound of other hoofs upon the road, and Jimmy Smith and Jerry Thompson came trotting up.

"Morning, Colonel!" They touched their hats. "Morning, Roger!" they grinned. "Early at it to-day!"

"Yes, early," answered Roger; "it's a pretty long way."

Jimmy looked round. He was the prime mover in what he had come to call "chaffing old Roger about 'the bronch.'"

"By Jove!" he began. "Taking Broncho to Meadsbrook! Couldn't you get anything from Sir Charles, or what?"

"I didn't want to," answered Roger shortly.

"But taking him to Meadsbrook! It's waste of a good day, old bean!"

"It mightn't be," answered Roger. He was used to Jimmy and

Jerry. He knew it was only chaff. But sometimes he found himself hoping that one day he really would be able to show them how wrong they were.

Jerry, riding in front with the Colonel, looked back and grinned. "Supposing he starts his little tricks, eh, Roger?"

But as Broncho arched his neck proudly and sniffed the mild morning air there was no thought of those "little tricks" in his mind. With pricked ears he glanced at the winding road ahead. The scattered groups of horsemen in front, increasing with every mile they jogged, the hurrying country folk afoot told him that to-day there would be hunting. And with now and again a playful shake of his head or a sideling from a blackbird in the hedgerow, he did his best to convey to his master that all would be well to-day. No more of what Jerry had called those "little tricks," of shameful episodes such as had taken place when he could not bring himself to face that uncertain take-off of loose clay! They lived in his memory still—inheritance of that dreadful past when he had been no more than a mass of quivering nerves and every man had been an enemy. But to-day he gazed with wide, wise eyes across the winter landscape, and his confidence had returned at last. Roger's hand was on the rein—Roger by trust in whose hand and knee and voice the great change had come about, and in his own way, as he jogged along, Broncho tried to tell his master of that miracle.

For it was little less than a miracle, though no one but Broncho himself knew from what a hell he had been redeemed. Though no one knew, either, how proud had been his spirit, and how confident his trust in the long ago days when he had first bent his head to the bridle and his will to his master's—his first old master who had lived on the farm in Ireland where he had been born and reared. He had been the apple of that first old master's eye. The English dealer had bought him, when at last he had been ready for sale, without what the stableman had called "two words." And it had been that strength and courage that had taken the dealer's eye, which had, in turn, brought

him into the hands of the rich man with the huge, red face. It was by the latter that his spirit had been so brutally broken and his confidence destroyed—for the red-faced man drank hard. Fall after fall had he given him—across wire, across impossible places—until at length he had refused to jump at all. And when he had refused, through fear, the red-faced man had beaten him, and when he was beaten he had reared! Thus eventually there had come a day when the red-faced man had shouted to a dealer: "Five-and-twenty? Right! And my advice is, when you get him home, shoot him!"

Through the following years Broncho's life had been a progress from bad to worse. Every man's hand seemed to be turned against him. Abuse and starvation had been his portion, and every change of ownership had been for the worse. Thus it had been that, cowed, weak, stubborn, every nerve a-tingle with revolt, he had blundered out into the sunlight of Farquason's backyard and, glancing with a sullen eye at Roger, seen but one more enemy.

But Roger had proved so different! After that first minute's wild plunging round Farquason's paddock he had begun dimly to feel it. He had realised it more fully as he had at length come shivering to a stand, and as he had walked down the hill to Thornton. If Roger could be firm, he was gentle! Yet so often in the past had he been deceived that even while he realised Roger's "difference" distrust died hard. But, little by little, patience had overcome it, and so slowly reaped its own reward. And now at last the miracle had happened. Broncho had come to realise that once more he had found a human being whom he could trust, and every nerve of heart and brain was a-tremble that winter's morning with the impulse to do good service.

Hounds met at the cross-roads by the old watermill, and as Broncho stood waiting on the strip of turf by the roadside, his ears pricked forward as he watched the gathering throng, memories of other days—the days when he had been known as "the four-year-old colt" and had gone hunting in the country of his birth with all a four-year-

old's impetuosity—came crowding to mingle with the anticipation of the moment. Roger felt those faint tremblings of excitement that ran through the horse's frame, noted those small shiverings of muscle and the prickings of those long, keen ears; but he, too, seemed to know that to-day all was well once again, and his sure touch on the rein and grip of the saddle told of his trust in the horse who was trusting him!

The hour struck from the clock tower of the village church upon the side of the hill, and, as its last note came floating down upon the faint February breeze, Sir Charles nodded to Hubert, the huntsman, and the pack moved forward up the road. After them, in twos and threes, surged the expectant field, horses snatching at their bridles, men catching their reins up short. Up the narrow way to the covert-side the pack turned, a tide of black-and-white and tan about their huntsman's horse's heels. And behind them, in narrow file, followed the cavalcade.

But in no heart amongst all that throng did hope beat higher than in Broncho's; he leaned on his bit, cantering gently against Roger's restraining hand. As they went by up the narrow way, where the gorse grew out on either side and one must needs hurry along in single file, every pulse was tingling with excitement, but not for a moment did he let it carry him beyond the limits that his master allowed.

As they turned out of the laneway into the open field by the covert-side there came an impulse to stretch himself across the level turf, but quietly Roger checked it. A little tighter his master's hold upon the reins and the next moment he was standing still, his eyes, like his master's, searching the distant landscape. Then, as he watched and waited, with quiverings of excitement and pricked ears, there came, breaking the silence, from the lower end of the covert, a whipper-in's view hulloa. Broncho changed hurriedly from one foot to the other, glancing first one way and then the other to see what would happen next. And then, as with head held high, he waited, out through the covert fence came a wave of black-and-white and tan.

With one drive they swept on to the line. With one burst of tongue they owned to it. "Forrard—forrard—forrard. . . ." came the huntsman's encouraging voice. And the next instant, with one wild surge, the field were galloping after them down the hillside.

With a snatch at his bit Broncho leaped forward. But the next moment he was again conscious of the restraining hand upon the rein, the hand whose even grip bade him collect himself and go steadily. Collectedly he strode down across the sloping field. Carefully he slackened his stride to canter through the gateway at the bottom. And then, with one shake of his head, one more snatch at his bit, one question to Roger to know if he might go a bit faster, he was striding across the succeeding field, his ears pricked for the music of the pack that came floating back to him. Quickly the first fence rose up before them. The slightest easing of the reins, the slightest increase of pressure of Roger's knees, the slightest slackening of pace upon Broncho's part before he gathered himself to spring, and then, with one long, even movement, the fence was left behind them, and they were galloping across the further field. The second fence rose up, and then the third; and as with one long, even, measured spring from his powerful quarters the fourth fence was cast behind him, Broncho found himself in the field with hounds. Joy rose in his heart as he saw them driving up along the hedgerow. There were not so many with them now! The huntsman was there, upon his chestnut, and Sir Charles upon his big bay. Jimmy Smith was there still, and Jerry Thompson, but old Colonel Lushington had been long left behind. And these others? Broncho, striding so evenly along, and Roger sitting steady in his saddle, knew how easily they, too, could all be left behind!

Hounds crossed a by-road. Obedient to the hand upon his rein, Broncho slowed down and jumped neatly out on to the grass siding. With wise eyes glancing towards whence came the fading cry of the pack, he moved easily up the road. Obediently he came to a stand a moment later while Roger hooked open a farmyard gate with his crop. And then, curbing his impatience as best he could, he followed the

huntsman's hurrying horse across the stony farmyard, and so out into the fields again.

But once there he needed no urging. With pricked ears he again strode forward in pursuit of the flying pack. Fence after fence sank behind him. Field after field fled beneath his galloping hoofs. Onward he strode, right-handed across a stretch of ploughland, a swing to the left then, and across a stiff post and rails. And as he crept ever and ever closer to the pack, past Sir Charles going gallantly on his bay horse, past Jerry, and then past Thomas, the first whip, and on until he was almost level with Hubert, those dark memories of the days of suffering were finally left behind.

Straight through the vale the brook ran, and, a field beyond it, loomed the railway embankment. As hounds bent downwards their huntsman watched them with anxious eyes. Which bridge, he wondered, would be the quicker—up to the right or down to the left? He must ride for one or the other—for no horse had jumped the Meadsbrook within his memory! Hounds bent to the right, then veered again leftwards.

"Left, sir. Make for the left!" Hubert shouted to Roger, and together they landed over the low rail into the field that ran down to the brook.

Roger glanced at him.

"Left! The left's shorter!" he shouted again, wheeling his chestnut round.

Roger nodded, and then lowered his hand on Broncho's rein. Sir Charles, he saw, was turning, and so were Thomas and Jerry Thompson, too. Yet even as he made up his mind to follow them, he glanced ahead once more to where hounds were struggling up the further bank out of the brook. And at that very moment, as he watched them driving ahead once again, straight towards the embankment on the line of a hard-pressed fox, above their music there came clearly on the winter air the distant roar of a train. For an instant he sat paralysed in his saddle. The next his mind was made up, and he was

urging Broncho straight on. Down to the brook with mighty strides the horse thundered. If he could jump it, Roger told himself, he might be able to save the pack?

Nearer and nearer the horse drew. The level turf fled backwards beneath his hoofs. But every stride brought nearer, too, that wide stretch of water; and beyond it, every moment nearer to the danger, raced the pack!

Roger's eyes sought them. For a moment, too, he saw the dark cloud of smoke that now rose above the railway cutting round the bend. But then his gaze came back once more to the gleaming water of the Meadsbrook that flashed ever closer before him, and bending low in his saddle he gripped his knees hard. Broncho, racing down at the brook, felt the firm grip of those knees, felt, too, the urging heel that pressed upon his flanks, and with one tremendous effort of heart and brain and sinew, one mighty drive of his powerful quarters, one huge stretch of his massive shoulders, he responded to his master's call. An instant later he flashed through the air. The next that gleam of water had passed beneath him and he was once more galloping along in pursuit of the flying pack. A moment later he was in front of them, wheeling to his master's hand. The next the thong of Roger's crop was crashing through the air, beating back the leaders off the line. And then, above the loud crashing of the whip and the rating voice, above the beating of Broncho's own stout heart that came so loudly to his ears, there flashed—near, very near, but past and gone in an instant—the thunder of the express!

The next moment his master had slipped to the ground and was stroking his sweat-stained neck.

"I *knew* you could do it, Broncho!" he murmured. "I knew it! I knew! I knew!"

That stream of water had passed beneath him

The Point-to-Point

Chapter the Seventh

ALL Sir Charles had said at the moment, when he had galloped hurriedly up from the direction of the bridge, had been "Well done, boy!" but that gruff word of praise was fully sufficient for Roger. And that evening after dinner the older man had suddenly added: "Roger, I take back everything I said. I can't think what it would have been like to have lost the pack."

"No thanks to me, please, Uncle Charles!" Roger answered hurriedly. "It was all Broncho's doing."

"Broncho!" said Sir Charles jerkily, and by his manner Roger knew how deeply he was moved. "I called him a brute last night, didn't I? Well, I take it all back. Broncho 'll find a good home here for as long as he lives. I want you to remember that."

Roger's eyes glowed.

"When his hunting days are over, you mean? I'll be certain to remember, Uncle Charles. And didn't he go well to-day? Hasn't he improved? Do you think I might run him in the point-to-point?"

The thought had sprung into Roger's mind as he had ridden happily home that afternoon.

"I knew you'd jump the Meadsbrook for me, Broncho," he had whispered. "I wonder how good you really are? Supposing we tried to show people—if only just for once?" And Broncho's tired shake of his head had seemed to make adequate answer.

But now that he had put the idea into words it seemed ever so much more difficult. Yet Sir Charles did not seem to see such absurdity in it as Roger himself had, for the moment, feared. Instead, nodding over his cigar, he had answered slowly:

"Indeed, I think you might."

"But you'll have to try and get him fit, you know," he continued a moment later. "It's unfair to a horse otherwise. You'd better try to get some advice from someone who knows—someone like old Cecil Dixon."

"What, old Major Dixon!" Roger exclaimed.

"Yes, old Cecil," answered Sir Charles. "He used to be first rate at it long ago. Supposing you went over one of these days to see him? He used to come here to shoot a lot, but he hasn't come lately since his leg's got bad."

A day or two later Roger rode Broncho over. He came upon the old Major busy amongst his sheep.

"Hullo, boy!" the other called. "Glad to see you! How are you? How're Sir Charles and your aunt? Ain't seen any of you this age!"

Roger slipped to the ground, running his arm through Broncho's rein.

"Sir Charles said he was sure you wouldn't mind," he began, "if I asked your advice about my horse. I want to get him ready for the point-to-point."

The old man's eyes began to sparkle.

"Delighted," he beamed—"delighted to . . . ," hobbling on a pace or two upon his stick. "And so this is Broncho? Heard of him, but never saw him before. Heard of him—you bet I did! Horse that jumped the Meadsbrook. Jumped it once myself long ago, but then the mare was runnin' away." And he laughed, and Roger laughed with him, and the sheepdog at his heels began to bark. "Well"—his eyes were once more running over Broncho, taking in that sweep of shoulder and back and loin—"well, there oughtn't to be much trouble about *him*."

Roger remained silent.

"How did you come by him?"

Roger told.

"Backed your judgment! Capital! Capital! Well, I think you may back it a bit more."

Once more the old man hobbled round the horse, and then he looked across at Roger.

"Just jump up again and canter round the field, will you?"

Roger cantered up and down the field, eased the horse's head and then let him stride along, cantered at the low hedge into the further paddock, Broncho clearing it in his raking stride, and then came cantering back again. And the old man, leaning on his stick by the sheep-pen, watched with delighted eyes. "Something extra, that horse," he told himself. "And the young fellow looks every bit as good." And then, with Roger once more dismounted and walking by his side, he turned back slowly towards the house.

"What you want, my boy," he began—and Roger, with bent head, listened carefully to his every word—"is just steady work and careful feeding. . . . A gradual building up—do you get me?—of wind and muscle. . . . A lot of fellows destroy their chance by too much galloping. When's this to be—mid-March?"

Mrs. Dixon was busy in her garden, but the Major insisted that Roger must "look in—just for a moment, you know." Drawing off her leather gauntlets, she assured him that he grew more like his father every day.

"Come and see Broncho, my dear," called the Major. "He'll be a smasher, or I'm mistaken. We'll do some good with him, Roger and I."

"Cecil's incurably hopeful, Roger," laughed Mrs. Dixon; but she scraped the mud off her shoes and came to see Broncho, and then told the Major that she believed he was right—for once. "And I hope you'll be lucky, young man," she added, once more drawing off her gloves to shake hands as Roger prepared to mount again.

"Tell Sir Charles," the old man called after him, "that I'll be over early in the week. Keep the horse walking and cantering. Not too much of the road. And two or three fences at a steady pace every now and then. Why," he laughed, as he turned to hobble back towards the house—"why, this quite reminds me of old times!"

Roger, looking round in his saddle, waved good-bye.

"Going to run him in the point-to-point? I was hoping, sir, that you would." Thus Harry, in high excitement when he heard the news. And even old Stanley approved.

"Should go well, sir, I dare say," he said judicially.

"Why, he'll just eat up the others!" announced Harry in his excitement. "Mr. Stanley, just you watch him stretch himself across a field."

"Remember, Harry," said old Stanley sternly, "you'll have to have that horse looking properly when Major Dixon comes over here."

One morning the next week old Major Dixon came, to stand critically in the centre of the big field behind the garden and watch Broncho stride gallantly by; to hobble up to him at the end of the gallop and listen carefully to his breathing; to glance at his flanks and to run his fingers lightly down his tendons and feel the hardening muscle on his neck; and, finally, to walk back to the yard to have another look at him in his box, and declare to Sir Charles that "it" did him good.

"Does me good, Charles—does me good. Deuce of a nice horse! Deuce of a good boy, Roger! He's just his poor father's son."

"I was against his buying the horse," Sir Charles admitted.

"Were you? Well, any sane man would be. But it worked out all right, didn't it? I'd give a good deal to see him win this point-to-point."

"So would I," admitted Sir Charles. "Of course, he'll be up against a lot of experienced fellows, and some quite good horses, too."

"Good enough for all of 'em—good enough," mumbled the Major; but whether he meant the horse or his rider Sir Charles could not tell.

Broncho certainly did well. Week by week the improvement became more noticeable. The regular work, the careful feeding, the hours spent by Harry in arduous strapping, all gradually told their tale. Week by week the Major became more confident, and Roger's own hopes began to mount high. Supposing he won it—just supposing!

It would show people that Broncho was as good as he looked. At moments his heart thrilled with a wild exhilaration. But there also came other moments when he questioned himself—would he be able to ride well enough? Questioned the Major's advice—was the training, the feeding, just right? Questioned even Broncho himself—was this race too much to ask of him so soon?

And so, while he lived in alternate moods of hope and doubt, came the morning of the race.

"Couldn't be looking better," old Major Dixon commented, having watched Roger saddling his horse. "And don't you worry about not having anything to school him with. He's all right. They don't know anything about you, and so they won't be looking for you, see?"

Roger nodded a satisfaction which he scarcely felt. He walked slowly back towards the weigh-tent, rolling his whip in his hands. Broncho, his sheet thrown over the saddle, was being walked round in the lower corner of the field by Harry, his wise eyes gazing placidly at the crowd, his head erect and confident. But these last moments of inaction were for Roger ones of doubt. "They"—the others of whom the old Major had spoken—Bellamy and Carstairs, Jimmy Smith with his good chestnut, Jerry Thompson on Colonel Lushington's brown—not for one of them was it "the first time," and some of them rode horses with well-known names. Jimmy and Jerry smiled their surprise as they saw him saddling.

"Having a cut with Broncho?" Jerry questioned.

Jimmy said: "Well, anyway, good luck!"

The others seemed unaware of his presence, though he thought he heard someone ask, "What's young Arbuthnot got—plug of a hunter?" and he thought, with a rueful smile, of how he'd planned to give Aunt Isabel the cup!

"They don't know anything about you, so they won't be expectin' you, see?" The old Major's advice repeated itself in his ears. "You've walked round the course, haven't you? There's nothing nasty about it except that drop fence down there by the stream. Steady for that,

and the rest of the way just keep him going quietly. Don't let them get too far away, but don't get in front too soon. And unless you surprise me, my boy, you'll surprise some of them. Nobody knows how good that horse is."

A moment later he had mounted and was gathering up his reins. The next, Broncho was slowly making his way down through the crowd to the start. And something in the easy strength of the horse's carriage, something in the steady restraint of his mien, brought back Roger's confidence with a rush. What matter about Jimmy or Jerry or the others? What matter about their fancied mockery or undisguised contempt? He knew Broncho, and knew that he might put all his trust in that loyal heart and steady brain, and that, win or lose, that trust would not be misplaced. His thoughts ran on. The first fence? Oh, that was easy. The second—easy, too! Up that long stretch of hill. . . . How Broncho's long stride would devour it! . . .

The next moment he was lining up to hear the starter's shouted, "Now, then, are you all ready? Then . . . GO!"

They went with a wild thud of hoofs and creak of saddlery. Almost at once the first fence seemed to rise in front of them. They swept down towards it, over it, and on towards the next, Broncho, with pricked ears, striding evenly along. Roger sat rigid in his saddle, knees gripped, hands down, gazing steadily ahead. Carstairs was in front on the grey. Jimmy lay second with the chestnut. That, he saw, was Bellamy to the right of him, and Jerry a little to the left. Remembering the Major's warning—not too far in front and not too much behind—he bent lower in his saddle and tightened his hold, and saw the others draw a length ahead. The third fence came . . . the fourth . . . the fifth. . . . A moment later they were bending round by the flag. A minute afterwards they were sweeping down towards the drop over the water. Steady a little more! He felt Broncho's stride shortening in response. He watched, in front of him, the grey and the chestnut jump at it. A moment later he was over and turning up the hill. He was lying fifth, but Jerry seemed to be coming back

Bruche landed over it - at Bellamy's fence

to him. The next fence was a cut-and-laid, and they jumped it side by side; and side by side they bent round the corner behind the wood.

Carstairs was still lengths ahead, with Jimmy on his heels. Bellamy was creeping up, his horse going well. They rounded the halfway flag, Broncho still striding easily along. Halfway! Roger wondered if he ought to move up a little, and the old Major's advice came singing in his ears, "Not too soon, and not too late." He bent lower in his saddle, and Broncho strode evenly on. As Jerry dropped back out of sight, Roger saw that he was gaining upon Bellamy. But Jimmy was creeping further away in front, though Carstairs' grey seemed to be tiring.

Yet there seemed to be no sign of tiredness about Broncho, skimming fence after fence in his sweeping stride. Roger watched Bellamy coming up towards the leaders. He himself, too, began to draw closer. They were coming downhill now, yet the grey was coming back to them. As they turned down at the water the pace grew faster. Roger touched Broncho's flank with his heel, and the horse's stride increased. The water stretched wide before them. A measured spring and it flashed beneath, and Broncho was once more striding onward across the level field.

All four now began to climb the hill for home. The wind was now straight in their faces. Little came above its roar to Roger's ears save the rhythm of the galloping horses. His breath was coming short and fast. Anxiety gripped him. Only four fences more! Ought he to move up closer, or ought he to wait longer behind? Bellamy was riding his horse, and as they came into the next fence he saw Carstairs hit the grey. There was a crash, and as Roger landed he saw Carstairs and the grey rolling in the field. Three fences more! He touched Broncho with his heel. Bellamy had caught up on Jimmy, but steadily Broncho crept closer. Another crash. Jimmy was down! Only one fence more to jump! Bellamy was two lengths ahead of him. He touched Broncho with his whip, and at once felt the horse lengthen his stride. The last! It rose up stiffly to meet them. Broncho landed over it at Bellamy's

girths. And then, bending low in his saddle, Roger urged the horse forward. Beside him Bellamy was riding for all he knew with set, dogged face. But steadily Broncho crept upward—to the saddle, to the shoulder, to the neck. At length he was a head in front. And then, amid a cheering that rose above the roar of the wind in his ears and the beating of his heart, the winning-post flashed past him. He had won!

Peace—and War!

Chapter the Eighth

AN excited crowd surged round as Roger rode into the unsaddling ring. Flushed and breathless, he slipped to the ground, unloosened Broncho's reins and saddle, and then, with a final pat to the horse's sweat-streaked neck, a final glance at his pulsing nostrils, he followed behind Sir Charles' broad back into the weighing-tent.

"Winner! Make way for the winner!" somebody called.

"Twelve stone?" queried the Clerk of the Scales. "That's right. Stand up. All right." And the next moment there was Major Dixon's hand upon his shoulder, and his cheery old voice in his ear:

"Well, what did I tell you? None of 'em know how good that horse is—even yet!"

And then came Bellamy—a fellow whom he scarcely knew—with a sincere "Well done, old man. Beat me fair and square! I wasn't expectin' you, but still, you beat me fair and square. Useful quod! Where did you come across him?"

It was a triumph—but its greatest moment was yet to be. For it was later, when at last Roger had freed himself from the crowd and was walking down the hill to watch the start of the next race, his thoughts busied with the question of how he should explain to Aunt Isabel that he wanted her to have Broncho's rose-bowl for her roses, that he felt a light touch upon his arm, and, looking round, found Farquason.

"Just a moment, sir," the latter began.

Roger waited, with a sense of expectancy.

"I'm delighted, Mr. Roger," the dealer went on, as he drew him out of earshot of the crowd—"delighted that the horse should have done so well with you! Our first deal, too! Well"—his shrewd eyes

were seeking to gauge Roger's expression—"well, it doesn't look, does it, as though it would be our last? But now, sir"—he lowered his voice—"the fact is, I have a customer. I might be able to get you a good price for your horse."

Roger shook his head.

"I think I could get you three hundred pounds"—Farquason watched—"or perhaps three-fifty? . . . I might possibly even get him to make it four hundred."

"No, Mr. Farquason," said Roger, beginning to move on.

"It's a great deal of money, sir," said Farquason pointedly.

"Mr. Farquason," answered Roger shortly, "Broncho is not for sale."

That night at dinner Sir Charles looked up at Lady Carrington. The rose-bowl was on the table between them, and Sir Charles had decided that the occasion demanded champagne.

"Do you know what, Isabel?" he said. "Farquason came to me about it. To me! Why, I haven't spoken to the man for years! 'It's a lot of money, Sir Charles,' he pointed out. 'Hang it!' I said, 'it isn't my affair. If the young fellow's fond of his horse, isn't he right to keep him? It does a man good to see a young fellow with some sort of feeling these days!'"

"I couldn't even *think* of selling him," Roger explained hastily.

Sir Charles glanced at him.

"I know. I think you're right, too! And, damn me—excuse me, my dear—may I never see another if he isn't a real good horse!"

"Next year——?" began Roger hopefully.

Sir Charles nodded.

"Yes, next year he might win you something good. Cheltenham I suppose you're thinking of—or Liverpool? But you'll have to do him well, Roger—do him very well."

And as a little later Roger hurried out to see Broncho again in his box, as the horse's low whinny of greeting came to him when he opened the stable door, as he stroked his nose and pulled the rug up

about his shoulders and ran a questioning finger over his flanks, he told himself—and whispered to Broncho also—that even if it were for no more than that day's triumph he should be "well done" all the days of his life. Walking back to the house again across the quiet, starlit yard, he became conscious of a feeling of pride that mingled with bodily tiredness and the aftermath of excitement. He thought of the rose-bowl that had been upon the dinner-table; of Sir Charles' satisfied smile as he had led the way into the tent after the race; of Bellamy's hurried glance of surprise as they had landed over the last fence together; and of Broncho's friendly nose coming poking towards him through the dusk of the stable in greeting. And these things, with one another, and with a pleasant sense of relaxing muscle and the recollection of the many incidents of the day, brought to him a satisfied feeling that now, at any rate, something worth while had been accomplished.

* * * * *

All that summer of 1914 Broncho spent amid the luxuriance of the park, standing beneath the shade of the beeches during the heat of the day, and cropping his fill of the fresh, sweet grass during the cool of the evenings in company with Sir Charles' bay and one or two others of the most favoured. And often Roger, hurrying past upon some business of the estate, would pause for a moment or two to run his fingers along the satin neck, to take stock once more of that sweep of shoulder and loin and quarter, and to murmur to Broncho of the triumph of the past and hint of those of the future. And often Sir Charles, also, would deviate from his well-beaten track down to the kennels and nod his approval towards Broncho's wise eyes, his thoughts, too, turning towards the triumphs that the future was to hold.

But that future was not to be. Breaking the peace of that sultry summer there came War! And as, one September afternoon, Roger listened to the bugle blowing for twelve o'clock "stables" and turned

down towards the horse lines of his squadron of the Southshire Yeomanry to see the horses being led forth to the watering troughs, he suddenly realised it with a greater definiteness than ever before. The past weeks had been full of hurried events. To the rumours of war had followed the reality. To Sir Charles, prophesying as he had scanned *The Times* before breakfast, a sudden call to his old colonelcy of the Southshires. And two weeks later, after days of rumour and counter-rumour and indecision, Roger had found himself humbly following Sir Charles' footsteps, with such few belongings as he had deemed necessary in the small valise that faced him upon the opposite seat of the dusty carriage of the slow-moving local train. He had been ordered to report at the huge, long unoccupied mansion upon the other side of the county in whose demesne the Yeomanry had always done their annual training, and which was now the headquarters of the Regiment. The approaching interview with his uncle had been very much in his thoughts all that morning, for he had felt that Sir Charles would not approve of the step he had taken.

"Tell Roger," had run his message in his last letter to his wife, "that if he does want to join up he had better do it properly. Tell him to go through Sandhurst. This war may be over soon enough, but, on the other hand, it may not. Nobody seems to know. We are slowly getting things shipshape here, but we are not yet up to strength. . . ."

And a very insignificant—as well as a possibly undesired—addition to that strength Roger had felt himself to be as he had reported that afternoon to the orderly in the hollow-sounding vastness of the mansion's stone-paved hall.

"The Colonel, sir? This way, sir!"

A moment afterwards Roger had found himself facing his uncle across a littered desk.

In his confusion he had remained tongue-tied.

"Ha!" said Sir Charles, sitting upright. "So you've arrived! I'd an idea you would, somehow! Some of your friends are here—young

At Manhattan Transfer.

Smith and young Thompson. Adams, my Adjutant, is in the next room. He'll put you right. How's your aunt, and everything? Adams, you know my nephew, Roger Arbuthnot?"

Captain Adams held out a freckled hand.

"Saw you win a race at the Hunt meeting," he laughed. And with a few questions about Broncho's well-being, Roger found himself received into the Yeomanry.

The succeeding weeks had been spent in a medley of small events, getting the hang of things, learning the drill. Fresh batches of recruits had arrived almost daily, many from his own neighbourhood, and each familiar face brought more and more home to Roger the difference that the war was going to make.

There came Bert Browning, the butcher's son; there came Clarkson, the underbailiff from Thornton. And only two days ago, as he had walked down the squadron lines, he had been greeted by Harry's wide-mouthed smile!

"What, you here?" he had exclaimed.

"I had to come, sir!" Harry answered apologetically.

And now, standing in the noontide sunlight, watching the horses wait their turn at the water troughs, Roger suddenly remembered that, though he had always looked upon Harry as inseparable from the stable yard, this season the stables would not be full. And that fact, more than the headlines in the newspapers, more than the rumours that came and went, more than even the faint booming of the distant guns that one and all sometimes imagined they could hear through the stillness of the autumn evenings, seemed now to bring home to him the reality of the war. He glanced at the men busied among the picketed lines, at the rows of tents pitched in the park, at the gaunt old mansion through whose door orderlies ceaselessly hurried, and he found comfort in the thought that every man of them all had joined with just such convictions as he held himself as to the need to win the war and thus make the future safe! And for him not least amongst those things which that distant future still might hold was that farm which he was one day to

own for himself, and those postponed triumphs that might still one day be his and Broncho's!

Something made him turn his head to see, coming towards him down the path from the house, a familiar civilian figure. Shading his eyes with his hand, he glanced up against the sun. Familiar though it seemed, at first he could not recognise it. And then the truth suddenly dawned on him—it was old Stanley's!

"Stanley! Come over to see Sir Charles!" he thought to himself; and remembered how rarely it was that Stanley ever left Thornton. Hurrying to meet the old man, he waved his hand.

"Hullo, Stanley!" he called; "looking for the Colonel?"

"No, sir," answered Stanley, pausing abruptly in front of him. "I've come over to see you."

"What is it?" asked Roger unconcernedly.

"It's Broncho, Mr. Roger," answered the old man. "The Government buyers came and took him. I couldn't hold out against them."

"Took him!"

"Yes, sir, yesterday. Two gentlemen in a motor-car. He's gone for a remount, with the chestnut and three of the others. They gave me this for you." He waved a slip of paper in the sunlight. It proved to be a cheque for fifty pounds.

Roger stood looking down at it abstractedly. At that moment he felt in no need of a cheque for fifty pounds or any other amount. All he felt was anxiety as to what might happen to Broncho. He had been thinking of his horse only a few minutes before, imagining him still to be as he had left him, secure in the park at Thornton, waiting for the war to end! And now, according to old Stanley's story, he was irrevocably immersed in it—most probably herded with half a dozen others in a cattle truck, jolting away towards the remount depot. Could he do anything about it? he wondered vaguely. It was old Stanley who brought him back to reality.

"They've taken every horse up to age in the county, sir," he said. "I don't think I could have kept him. The pity was you didn't

bring him here yourself." Roger was thinking just that, too. "I went to her ladyship about it, and she said we shouldn't think too much of ourselves in these days of the country's need."

"No, indeed," Roger nodded. He could just hear Aunt Isabel saying that! He found himself longing to assure her that it was not in that sense that he regretted losing Broncho.

"But this"—once more old Stanley fluttered the cheque in the sunlight—"this for a horse that might be worth five hundred pounds!"

But it was not that aspect of the situation either that so worried Roger. Broncho was to him not a possession but a friend. He saw him coming into the ownership of someone who might not understand him, and perhaps once again suffering ill-treatment and abuse. That at all costs must be prevented! Hurriedly a scheme arose in his mind. Perhaps Sir Charles could do something? He glanced down at old Stanley's puzzled face.

"I'm very glad you came to tell me, Stanley," he said. "I'll see at once if anything can be done."

Five minutes later he was standing before Sir Charles' desk, realising that, through the "difference" of the war, he shouldn't have come upon such an errand. Sir Charles was shaking his head.

"I don't see that I can do anything. It isn't that I'm not sorry about the horse. But in my position I cannot allow anything that would look like favouritism. This isn't civilian life. One must go by the rules, Roger. I'm sorry about Broncho, very sorry; but we've all got to sacrifice something these days. That chestnut I saw you with on parade, he carries you satisfactorily, doesn't he? If not, you may exchange for anything you fancy from the lines. And now, my dear boy, I've got a pile of papers to get through, so if you see Adams about, will you send him in to me?"

Roger's feeling, as he made his way back across the hall, was one of dismay, not the least part of which arose from his realisation that he had put Sir Charles in an awkward position. At the moment that

seemed even worse than the fact that the war was costing him Broncho. He passed out into the sunlight, angry and sore.

On the following few days the chestnut that he rode seemed even more inadequate than usual. More and more often he found himself wondering why he had not thought of bringing Broncho when he had joined. They could have joined up together! Together they could have adventured into the war. But, when he had said good-bye on that summer's morning in the park, he had not realised that the war was going to make such a "difference."

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At the end of the week there came a message that the Adjutant wanted him. Adams received him with his usual freckled smile. He was—Colonel's orders—to detrain a batch of remounts that were due in that afternoon, and if there was anything amongst them he might prefer to his charger, he could make the exchange!

Roger thanked the other listlessly. One strange horse was, to him, much the same as another. Listlessly he set about his duty. Listlessly he checked the papers of the sergeant in charge. Listlessly he watched the horses detrain. And then, of a sudden, stepping out from one of the waggons, he saw Broncho, and he remembered the twinkle there had been in Adams' blue eye when he had mentioned that it had been the Colonel's suggestion that he might exchange for anything he preferred.

But it was not until much later that Sir Charles admitted to being aware of the exchange that at once took place!

Ordered Out

Chapter the Ninth

BRONCHO did not care about "the War"—of that Roger felt sure—though for neither of them had it yet come to mean anything more than the routine of the Southshires' training. Drilling amid the open spaces of the park, or taking his place in the column that wound slowly along the country roads, seemed but dull work to Broncho, though work to be endured because it seemed his master's will. Once again life had changed for him—changed with that suddenness which had so often before been his lot. As he had jolted along in the horse-box in the heat of that September afternoon, fresh from all the noise and confusion of the remount depot, it had seemed that, with a strange completeness, all his friends had deserted him—those friends upon whom he had come to so depend, Roger and Harry and old Stanley. Once more he had found himself in the hands of strangers in whom he could place no trust. And so when at length the train had stopped with a crashing of buffers at the wayside station, and the side of the truck had been let down, and he had stepped, blinking, out on to the sunlit platform, it had been with a sullen feeling born of his fear. And it was then that, amid the shouting and confusion, the neighing and snorting of frightened horses, he had caught the sound of a familiar voice, exclaiming: "By Heaven, if it isn't Broncho!"

The next moment Roger's hand had been stroking his muzzle, and he was gazing down at his master with limpid eyes.

After that life had changed once again for the better. He found himself stabled in one of the long-disused boxes of the big stable yard. He found Harry there to see to his wants just as in the days of long ago. True, there was a "difference"! But he bore with all that because it seemed to be his master's will. Yet how that master of his, as autumn

deepened into winter, as the hedgerows shed their leaves and the country opened up, could spend his time watching the troops canter past in the park or file along before him on the highroad instead of going out for a day with hounds as they used to long ago was another of those things which Broncho could not understand. Yet such was his master's will!

It was his master's will that he should stand—champing his bit, perhaps, with a pardonable impatience, and now and then changing from leg to leg—while the squadron filed past at the trot, their accoutrements jingling. It was his master's will that he should follow, so many paces behind, while they marched slowly in column along the muddy roads. But sometimes, out doing field work, Roger would bend down in his saddle and ease his rein and so tell him that he might go striding along over the downs. Sometimes there might be a fence to jump. Sometimes, too, there might be a further stretch of grassland beyond it to stride over. But always all too soon there would come that well-known touch upon his mouth and that murmured, "Steady, old man!" and he would have to ease up and return to rejoin the squadron because such seemed to be his master's will. Always within sight of that squadron, and never within sound of a hound!

But the months of training did their work. "Men and horses—very fit," ran the General's report. And a few weeks later, when Harry came to evening "stables," he murmured in Broncho's ear that they would be "for it" very soon.

Broncho, nuzzling in his manger, looked round at him with questioning eyes.

"France, old man, you and I and Mr. Roger! We've all got our orders." And Harry laid his hand against the horse's silken neck.

* * * * *

At length there came the day of setting forth—a day when Broncho found himself one of a long file that wound slowly in threes out of the depot yard and down along the busy road that led to the docks.

"Eyes right!" commanded the squadron leader, as the files of threes came past the commanding officer; and though the Colonel acknowledged the salute of the man astride the near-side horse, his glance turned towards the horses rather than the men. For none were to go save horses fit to play their parts—parts that might well mean the saving of the lives of men. And so as Roger's squadron passed slowly along, and as Harry raised his hand stiffly to salute and turned his head, it was upon Broncho, walking so soberly by, that the Colonel's eyes were focussed.

"Good type of horse," he murmured beneath his breath. "Exceptionally good!"—and found himself hoping that so gallant a spirit might not be overtried amid the mud of Flanders.

Broncho, pacing soberly in his place in the long column that wound outward along the docks towards where the big ships rode at anchor, harboured no such thoughts of the future. He was in the hands of those whom he could trust. And so, with trustful, surprised gaze, he watched the busy activities of the docks, and the water lapping darkly against the quayside. So, too, he followed Harry up the straw-laid gangway of the ship, and suffered himself to be tied up. And so also, nibbling at his hay during the subsequent hours of waiting, he listened with pricked, attentive ears to the noises that came and went.

And then, when at length dusk fell, making the Channel safer for the passage, slowly and softly the transport's engines purred into life. Very slowly and softly they first echoed through the gathering dusk, but every revolution grew louder and more powerful until at length the timbers began to quiver beneath Broncho's feet, so that he stirred uneasily and rattled at his chain. But at that moment of doubt came Harry to run a workworn hand soothingly down his neck and assure him that there was nothing to be afraid of. And so, having rubbed his nose against Harry's shoulder to tell him that he understood, he turned once more to pick choice morsels out of his hay, and to watch with serious, questioning eyes the dock lights that were slipping astern. Very slowly, very smoothly, with now scarce even a quiver of the puls-

ing engines, the transport made her way down Southampton Water and out into the open sea. There was no moon to break the darkness of the night, no light save, perhaps, a sudden flashing message winked out from one of the transport's unseen protectors, no sound save the steady purring of the engines, and the faint wash of the waves against the bow. All night long the ship ploughed her way through the dark waters, while the troops slept huddled upon her decks and the horses stirred uneasily in their places. And then, as the dawn stole greyishly into the eastern horizon, and Broncho in the dimness sensed, as animals do, the coming of the day, with a trembling of reversing engines the transport came to quayside, the gangways were let down, and disembarkation commenced.

Half an hour later the clear light of a spring-time dawn saw Broncho landing in France. And as he looked about him, at the busy throngs upon the quay, at the heavy-eyed groups of soldiers, he suddenly heard a familiar voice, and looked up to see Roger coming towards him. It seemed, this hour of dawn, a fitting one for the start of an adventure. The light was clear, intense. The air was keen and cold. And as Roger laid his hand upon his horse's neck and murmured, so low that none save Broncho heard him, "Old man, we're for it together," might not Broncho's answering rubbing of his head against that well-known shoulder have been to say that he understood?

Landing in France

Somewhere in France

Chapter the Tenth

THEY entrained, horses and men, at the quayside in the clear light of early morning, but it was almost noontide before the wartime engine began very slowly and laboriously to move forth. All that afternoon, with the long string of waggons rumbling along behind it, it panted across the level land of France, to arrive, just as evening fell, at the base. There for some weeks they remained, awaiting orders, while rumour gave place to counter-rumour and the sense of expectation grew. Sometimes Broncho, standing in his stall in the lines, might prick his ears at a dull booming that came very faintly from far away, borne upon the spring-time wind, and wonder what it might mean. And sometimes Roger, pausing on his way back to Mess, might glance at the pointed spires and tall factory chimneys of the city, beyond which they were encamped, rising mistily into the evening haze, and, watching the sky behind them deepen and fade, the river gleam, the stars begin to glimmer, and the pine woods beyond the tents merge into the darkening night, he might pause to ask himself how soon this peaceful interlude of existence was to end.

For, one thing with another, it was a peaceful existence. Daily they exercised in the neighbouring expanse of parkland or along the country roads. Daily there was rigorous drill, rigorous stable inspection, and daily they awaited orders.

And then, with a certain unexpectedness, the orders suddenly came. They were to move north. A "push"—so rumour ran—was in preparation, and cavalry were being massed behind the line to be ready in the event of a break through. Roger, riding Broncho forth at the head of his troop as they started off, once more felt that sense of adventure. And with every mile they drew nearer to the battle zone. Distant

still, yet not now so faint, came the booming of the guns. And by noon of the first day's march a subtle change had come upon the countryside. A certain gauntness seemed to have crept into the landscape—a gauntness that, for those who had eyes to see it, told a tale of its own! This was the country that had been tortured in the early days of the war. And though it was seeding time and the peasantry were busy in the fields, though spring was daily softening the harsh outlines of winter, every here and there a blackened homestead stood derelict by the wayside, and every here and there a shimmering poplar or white-flowered cherry spread lopped and shorn branches against the blue of the spring-time sky.

The rest-camp where they were quartered that first night was on the edge of a once prosperous village. But that, too, during those early days, had seen warfare. Roger noted the once shattered and now crudely repaired windows as he rode up the village street. The camp at the back of the village was very full. Remounts for artillery and transport came in daily. It seemed obvious that a "push" was in prospect. But while they waited, anxious and expectant, the spring-time sunshine gave place once more to days of winter rain. The drying roads, along which they had marched up, once more reverted to seas of liquid mud. Pack-horses and mules down from the line, mud-covered, verminous, spoke eloquently of what conditions further up were like. And it would seem that the return of winter weather influenced the High Command. Temporarily the push was abandoned. Cavalry would not be needed at the moment. Orders came to the Southshires to leave their horses and, for the time being, go up to hold a sector of the line.

Broncho was still in his improvised stall, nuzzling among the unsavoury remains which were all that was left of his forage, when Roger came to him to say good-bye. He glanced round at the sound of the familiar footstep and whinnied a greeting. To have his master with him amid these strange surroundings brought a sense of comfort! But Roger's thought, as he laid his hand upon his horse's neck, was that this was probably the last time they would ever meet. For no orders had

been issued as to the horses. All his questions could gain no further information than that the Southshires were being temporarily dismounted, and that their present horses would most probably be reissued as remounts. This, then, Roger told himself ruefully, meant seeing the last of Broncho. And his thoughts ran on, not to the hideousness of risk and discomfort that it might be his own lot to face, but to his horse's future. Discomfort he was already enduring. Privation and risk might also easily come. But greater than all those, in his master's mind at that moment, ran the fear of his falling into the hands of somebody who might not "understand."

"Trust him, whoever he is, old man, and do whatever he wants you to," he whispered.

It was then, as he was giving the horse's muzzle a final stroke and summoning up his resolution to go, that the message came. The transport officer had gone sick, and he was to take over. That meant, Roger knew, that he should not go up to the line. But it also meant that he would have the opportunity of keeping Broncho. And though he was conscious of a feeling of relief, he was also conscious of a feeling that, in a sense, he was deserting the others. Jimmy and Jerry and all the rest —he did not feel like leaving them now that things looked likely to be bad! But orders were orders! And no one knew what any of them might yet have to face.

The Regiment wound out of camp in the dull light of a drizzling morning. It seemed a drab beginning to the last stage of their adventure, that adventure of which, in those now far-away days of training, Roger had so grandly dreamed! But on this drizzling morning, with the road that stretched before them a sea of liquid mud, with the landscape stretching flat and colourless away on either hand with a growing sense of desolation, and the increasing nearness of the guns that boomed beyond the horizon, it seemed little like adventure. It was, rather, something to be endured as best one might, something to be "gone through with," for the sake of the present—and of the future; for those days at the covert-side, for those evenings jogging along home

behind Sir Charles' hounds, for the hopes of that farm which was to be Roger's own one day, for the memories of Aunt Isabel in her garden, and Marjorie mocking and running away! Only for such memories, and for that sense of companionship that came from the sight of that long khaki column swinging so soberly ahead, all hearts set upon "going through" with it, could this deepening phase of the dread adventure be endured. And he was bringing Broncho with him, to share the discomforts and the risks! Yet the rhythm of the horse's movement as he walked so steadily along, the feel of that strong, smooth shoulder beneath his hand, those ears pricked keenly forward beneath his gaze as he looked ahead, brought to Roger a fresh sense of comfort and companionship. To Broncho that familiar, murmuring voice and that familiar hand upon his shoulder brought comfort also, even though, as he walked steadily on, his pointed ears and faintly quivering nostrils seemed to tell that he, too, knew that the distant rumbling of the guns meant unknown dangers to be faced.

They camped, that last evening, near a hamlet, and the next afternoon arrived at their destination, a village whose name, in the troops' efforts to interpret the patois of the local peasants, became changed into "Longneck." At "Longneck" the transport was to stay. And Roger, riding down the village street, past the church with its broken walls, past the curé's house, upon the opposite side of the road, and the estaminet lower down, felt once again that strange feeling, half of regret, half of relief, that he was no further to share the general fate of the Regiment, which was to march up to the line as soon as darkness fell. Yet "Longneck" itself was a position of no more than comparative safety, well within range of the "heavies" that boomed frequently through the greyness of the day.

A shell hole in the curé's garden proved that beyond all doubt. Roger saw it when, later in the afternoon, he went to find where Harry had stabled Broncho. By some means or other Harry had found a covered stall, a low shed with a roof of lichen-bound tiles that also sheltered the curé's hens, but which was far better than the

transport lines down by the river; and there Roger eventually discovered his horse, nuzzling at his provender in an apparent acceptance of his lot, while Harry, at the stable door, sought earnestly to make reply to the curé's friendly questions. And as he listened to the latter Roger suddenly realised that the white-haired old man, whom he remembered saluting as he had ridden down the village street, was now Broncho's host, and, summoning up his French, tried to give proper thanks for the curé's kindness.

"Why not?" the curé answered, with a shrug of his lean shoulders. "The last officer's horse made use of the stable, too! And this is so gallant-looking a horse. . . ." He glanced with quick appreciation towards Broncho. Besides, he himself had not now nearly so many hens. . . .! It was the war. . . .!

He shook his head sadly, glancing with lined eyes straight at Roger. They in the village lived a hard life nowadays! With a quick gesture he indicated, first, the troops bivouacked in the meadows above the river; then the shell hole in his garden, which marked where his melon beds had been; and, lastly, the dark old stable which sheltered now but half its number of hens. "A hard life! But can one grumble? It is the war!"

That evening the Regiment moved up into the trenches, leaving Roger to share billets with the Quartermaster; to share also the responsibility of getting the rations up the line night by night. A few hours later saw Broncho once again saddled, and together he and his master set out upon the first of many journeys with the rations—the laden transport rumbling behind them along the road. It was a long and circuitous route they had to follow. One began by branching off eastward some two miles out from "Longneck." Then onward for about three-quarters of a mile, round the shoulder of a sloping hill where there were many batteries, and then eastward to the ruined estaminet which was known as "Quality Corner"!

Beyond "Quality Corner" one could not go until after dusk, and so as the days lengthened and spring-time came to its own once more,

the transport were obliged to start later and later. Each night when the Regiment was in the trenches, Roger and Broncho made that journey up and back again, in charge of the rations. Broncho, if one might judge from his sober bearing, might have felt the responsibility that was his. Roger, comparing the comfort of his billet in "Long-neck" with the squadron's dug-outs, and the few hours of risk that were his to the continual strain the others were enduring, sometimes became conscious of a feeling that he ought to be "up there." The monotony also increased it. Each night's journey was very like another! But sometimes there was shelling along the road. Sometimes, too, there might be a message waiting for them at "Quality Corner"—they were to hurry, or they were to wait a bit. Sometimes the gloom of the night was unrelieved. Sometimes the Verey Lights soared for a brilliant moment into the sky. But, come what might, the Regiment must have its rations, and not once did the transport fail!

Every evening they halted at the derelict farm beyond "Quality Corner," close to which the communication trenches began, and here the ration parties from the line met them. Quickly the limbers were emptied of their loads and on their way home again.

Sometimes there was a message for Roger that the Colonel wished to see him, and as he followed the laden men, splashing slowly along water-logged stretches of the communication trench, there always came to him a sense of the eerie. Turning abrupt corners to find men peering white-faced at him, groping his way in a ghostly half-light through a stillness only broken by muttering, unseen voices and occasional rifle and machine-gun fire or the distant boom of a "heavy," brought a feeling such as he had never known before.

On such occasions Harry held Broncho and his own horse in the shelter of the broken walls of the farm, while the transport set off on its return journey under the sergeant. Roger usually caught them up before they reached "Quality Corner," which experience had proved to be almost the end of their danger zone.

One night towards the end of the month things seemed even

more quiet than usual. Save for a distant rattle of machine-gun fire, scarce a sound disturbed the silence while the transport toiled up the road through the gathering dusk. There was no warning message waiting for them at "Quality Corner," where all was quiet among the batteries perched on the side of the hill above. Riding slowly onwards towards the farm, Roger gazed into the thick darkness which had enveloped the landscape. The sky hung low. Not a star was to be seen. Not a flicker of light showed anywhere. Not even a tree stump was silhouetted in gaunt outline against the sky. Nothing was distinguishable in the darkness save only a faint glimmer of the muddy, broken road along which Broncho carefully picked his way and the dark bulk of the nearest limbers rumbling behind.

At the farm, too, all seemed strangely quiet. Jimmy Smith was waiting.

"The Colonel wants you," he said, and, after the transfer of the rations had been made and the transport had started on its way back, remarked as they entered the communication trench: "There's going to be the father and mother of a strafe."

Roger laughed.

"You tell me that every time I come up, Jimmy," he replied.

"Honest! I know there is. We were out raiding last night and met the Boches on the same game. *They* wanted to see who *we* were! See?"

Roger laughed again.

"Why, it's as peaceful as could be! There wasn't a thing stirring all the way up."

"Well, you'd best hurry back again before they do start, else you may have to spend the night with us."

Once more Roger laughed.

"Rather have to-morrow's rations than my company, eh?"

"A good bit," Jimmy laughed back.

In the light of the Headquarters' dug-out Roger looked across at Jimmy and thought that he seemed as though he were feeling the strain.

When at length the Colonel said, "Good-night," Roger followed Jimmy to his trench, where, though hailed with the customary welcome, under the general cheerfulness he could see signs of restlessness.

In spite of his anxiety he stayed on, sitting on a packing-case by the dug-out table, talking, not of life at "Longneck," but of good days long ago with Sir Charles' hounds.

Worried though he himself was about the returning transport, he began to tell him news of home that had come through in his last letter from Marjorie, watching his friend's face, anxiously trying his clumsy best to cheer the other up.

Then suddenly the "strafe" broke into being. A roaring shriek above their heads, a far-away bang, another and another. . . . The squadron commander glanced up from the book he had been reading.

"Well, Jimmy," he began, "you're right, if that gives you any satisfaction. They're at it, and no mistake!"

Jimmy laughed—a laugh into which there had once again come confidence.

"It's better than waiting for it, at any rate," he said.

Roger stood up. Outside the din was growing. Shell after shell went hurtling above their heads, falling far behind them, beyond the communication trenches. Flash after flash swept the sky, showing for an instant the desolate landscape.

"It's 'Quality Corner' hill they're at," announced a subaltern, coming down the dug-out steps. "I saw a Boche plane gettin' over to-day. He must have spotted the batteries."

And Roger remembered the transport, perhaps already at "Quality Corner," and Broncho with Harry at the farm!

"Look here, you fellows," he said, "I'd better be going. My show must be halfway back by now, and it looks to be pretty hot just thereabouts."

Once more the squadron commander glanced round from his book.

"Stay a bit, Arbuthnot, I'd advise you. It sounds pretty bad back

there now. If they're in it they're in it, and if they're not they're not; and you can't do much good either way."

"Still, sir, I ought to be with them, so I think I'd better have a try."

The next moment he was running up the steps, into the noise and the screaming of the hurtling shells. Flash after flash lit up the night as he hurried along. The shells looked to be falling short of their objective, but very close to the derelict farm.

Figures rose out of the darkness and sank silently back again as he hurried on. The transport had passed him on their way back half an hour ago, one of the regimental police told him, and glanced in surprise after Roger as he hurried forward. Then, shrugging his shoulders, and muttering that he wouldn't "give the young fellow half a chance," he turned to thoughts of his duty. Roger hurried on.

Some few shells had fallen about the reserve line as he came down the communication trench; now the range was increasing and they had crept up to the farm.

And Broncho was at the farm!

There was a lull in the shelling as at last he stepped out on to the road. It was still so dark that it was only with difficulty he found his way; but every now and then a flare momentarily lit up the landscape, showing him the farmhouse ruins in front. Thanking Providence for the lull, he hurried on; but as he reached the yard a shell landed in the orchard, raising a shower of clay and stones, to come pattering down about and around him. But the ruins of the house were still as they had been, and, flashing his torch as he hurried through the doorway, he saw Harry with the horses, restive but unharmed.

"Old man," he whispered, as he led Broncho out, followed by Harry, and climbed into the saddle, "we've got to face it together, you and I!"

As they picked their way through the debris another shell fell, short of them, then another far away in front, and a third as they

turned up the road towards "Quality Corner," and as Roger glanced back he saw the ruins of the house springing into flame behind him. The trot became a gallop. The burning farm lighted up the first stretches of the road. Shell after shell fell methodically—to the right, to the left, behind, in front. But they seemed in luck's way. Another half-mile and they would be at "Quality Corner." There was no sign of the transport, so it looked as though it must have got through. Bending low in his saddle, Roger ran a hand along Broncho's neck.

"Steady, old man," he whispered, "we're leaving Harry behind, but we've nearly come through the worst of it."

At that moment there came a roar and a sudden blinding flash.

* * * * *

The transport at last had reached the sanctuary of "Longneck." Old Evans, the Quartermaster, was congratulating the sergeant on having come safely through as dirty a night as one could wish to see, when he caught the sound of a horse coming slowly down the village street.

"Cripes!" he said; "here's young Roger back. He's all right, but where's Harry?"

But as the slow, limping horse with a figure crouched low over the pommel of the saddle turned into the lines he realised that it was not quite "all right." Evans ran forward. "He's got one, he has! Come and catch hold of him, Bill," he cried.

Carefully they lifted Roger down.

"Arm and shoulder, shell splinter," announced the Quartermaster, running his hand over the sodden jacket. "Broncho's got one too, Bill! What's his?"

"Same thing, far's I can see," answered the other, after a moment's inspection. "Poor brute, there's a big piece tore clean out."

"He's got on his horse! Come excited hold of him!"

On the Casualty List

Chapter the Eleventh

ROGER woke again to consciousness amid a smell of antiseptics and a sense of whiteness and much light. He would, he was told, be transferred to the base and thence to England. Harry, lying pinned beneath his dead horse, had been picked up by some gunners soon after dawn. Broncho, he heard, in answer to his inquiries, was also being moved to the base. But no more information about his horse was vouchsafed him. In the words of the old curé, "It was the war!"

Broncho had sunk exhausted when at length he had succeeded in hobbling back to the curé's stable on that eventful night, and the old man, coming to visit him early in the morning, had murmured sympathetically to Harry that it was the war. "C'est la guerre, mon enfant! Hélas le beau cheval!"

Shrapnel wounds, torn ligaments. Such was the official verdict upon Broncho's injuries. It depended—the veterinary officer did not state explicately upon what—as to whether he would ever be quite well again. . . . And so Broncho, his shoulder so numb and irresponsive that he could scarcely move, his seared flesh protected from infection by hurriedly applied dressings, was loaded with difficulty into a horse ambulance, and thus began the first stage of his journey down to the base. Pain and exhaustion were struggling for mastery in his spent frame as the ambulance jolted along. Sometimes his eyes were open, displaying the wide iris of pain. Sometimes for long periods they were closed, and his head leaned dejectedly against the side of the ambulance. But whenever he opened them the world throbbed and swam before him. And whenever they were closed that dull throbbing, and the dull grinding of the wheels along the pot-holed road, seemed to centre itself in his exhausted brain. Life passed him by mistily.

Voices, faces, all were strange. Harry's pained face had passed from view as the ambulance lurched out of the curé's yard, and of his master there had been no sign since they had struggled home through the night together. Yet hands which, even in the midst of his exhaustion, he had recognised as skilful and tender had come to give him first aid in the curé's stable. Skilful hands, too, had aided him to struggle up the ambulance's sloping platform. And when at last they came to a stand, some two hours later, on the little quay beside the broad canal, those same skilful hands and soothing tones came to aid and encourage him in his climb down again.

A spring-time breeze came eastward up the long stretch of the canal, rippling the placid waters and causing the moored barges to rock gently against the walls of the quay. It came, too, that cool, spring-time breeze, to ruffle the matted forelock that hung upon Broncho's forehead, to cool his throbbing brain and wipe the mists of pain from before his eyes. And so, lifting his tired head, he glanced about him at the long stretch of rippling water, at the dark barges moored to the quay, and, lastly, at the long line of stricken horses—of which he himself was one—patiently waiting their turn to go on board. Slowly, painfully, the short journey to the gangway was accomplished. With difficulty they hobbled across one by one. Lowering his head, Broncho struggled into the improvised stall beneath the fluttering tarpaulins, skilful hands to aid his progress, encouraging voices to urge him on. And there, his quarters leaned against the rail, the rope of his halter sagging motionless beneath his chin, black exhaustion came down upon him once more. He knew nothing of the noisy waking to life of the barge's engines, or of its slow putting out, with its cargo of stricken, on to the placid water of the canal.

When he woke it was again daylight, but whether a day had passed or no he could not have told. Thirst had come upon him. His mouth was hot and dry, his tongue rough and clumsy; but water had been left by his side, from which he drank. There was feeding there, too, a few handfuls of crushed oats mixed with bran, a bundle of forage tied to

Slowly, painfully the last journey of the journey was accomplished

the rail of the standing—but he felt too sick to eat. And there he stood—dully conscious of the sounds around him, of the occasional stamping of his neighbours' feet, of the slow breeze flapping among the tarpaulins, of the vibration of the barge's engine and the faint wash of the placid waters against its bow, but far more so of that flaming pain which every now and again shot upwards through his being, and of that dull throbbing which marked every movement, his head bent low, as his spirit submitted, with animal patience, to endure.

Suddenly the spluttering of the engine died away. Slowly the barge drifted in once more to a quayside. And then, with a sound of gangways clattering into place, of newcomers hurrying on board, of orders being given and acknowledged, it was borne upon Broncho that he had reached one more stage on the way to his destination. Soon enough, too, came skilful hands to aid him in his progress to the shore. Blinking, stumbling, every breath a difficulty, every movement pain, he slowly made his way out into the sunlight.

"Operating theatre," said a voice at his side, and the orderly at his head saluted. And then, hobbling painfully across the barrack square, he was led into a building where whitecoated men were waiting to receive him.

"Shrapnel case, sir," explained the Lieutenant in charge.

A big man in a white coat nodded.

Broncho, sniffing a strange smell that hung in the air, saw that they were tying hobbles on his feet. What was it for, he wondered? Did they not know that he was prepared to bear whatever they wished to do to him, that he had learned from his master to trust men? A rope was quickly fastened round his body. A deft movement—and he was lying on the ground! Some of the old-time fire flashed in his eye as he tried to lift his head in protest. But then something came floating about his nostrils—something against which his senses were powerless to protest, and the next moment he was lying unconscious on the floor.

"Well," said the surgeon, fitting his knives back into their case, "I think I have made a good job of it. Look at that, and that, and

that. . . ." He nodded his head towards several rough-edged lumps of metal. "I don't think there can be anything left. But as for the ligaments, it'll take them a long time to knit!"

Broncho, upon the floor, was slowly regaining consciousness. With half-opened eyes he watched the figures moving to and fro.

"Gallant horse, too," the big man continued, looking down at him. "I'd spare no pains to try to save him. I can't think of another struggling so far with so much metal inside."

"Do you think he'll come right, sir?" his assistant questioned.

"Can't say yet. It's about an even-money chance."

Twice a day for a long time after that the big man came himself to see Broncho in his stall, to adjust strappings and dress his wounds. And the touch of those fingers, so skilfully soothing his pain, told Broncho that the big man was a friend. Slowly but surely that jagged wound began to heal. And one morning, as the big man bent absorbed over his work, Broncho tried to make acknowledgment. Very gently he turned his head and slowly rubbed his muzzle against his shoulder.

"Steady, horse!" the latter murmured, intent on his work.

Again Broncho tried, touching the stooping shoulder; and this time the big man looked up and understood.

"Thanking me, are you? Well, if I *am* a good doctor, I must say you are a good patient." He smiled. "Between us we'll have you right again one day, old man." He stood upright, looking above the orderly's head into Broncho's wise eyes. "And I'll bet you've got a bit of a history, too," he murmured.

Marching at the head of the column along the Bapaume road

The Friends are Parted

Chapter the Twelfth

IT was later, almost two years later—for a clear mid-March dusk lingered as though loth to fall upon the level countryside—when Broncho once more set forth with his master upon an eventful journey, marching at the head of the column along the Bapaume road. Roger, following the familiar figure of Sir Charles, sat erect in his saddle, gazing out before him into the spring-time dusk. Ahead, in the distance beyond Péronne, from somewhere towards the heights of St. Quentin, came the desultory rumbling of the guns. And along the shell-pitted road that led from Albert to Bapaume the Southshires hurried, to the clatter of hoofs and the jingle of bits. Roger, riding along at the head of his squadron, was very conscious of a feeling of foreboding, though why he could not have said. But he drew comfort from the thought that, now that at last the call for cavalry had come again, Broncho was with him once more to share that future that lay in that region of battle whence sounded the rumbling of the guns.

In the lines beyond Ypres, War had lain her hands upon them both. And now they were again together. Roger, some three months after he had been wounded, had returned to his Regiment, a shattered Regiment, with Adams as second-in-command and Jimmy Smith as squadron commander. But Broncho's wounds had been more severe. All that first summer he had lain in the sick lines. Autumn had come before he had begun to limp painfully about the exercising paddocks. And save that he had trusted in his friends, in the round-faced orderly —not unlike Harry—in the big surgeon with the gentle voice and the skilful hands, life had seemed very dreary until one day he had caught the sound of a long-remembered voice.

Long-remembered! It had been so very long since he had last

heard it that it had almost faded into a memory of the past. Yet at its faintest echo that past sprang to life once again. His ears pricked eagerly forward. He gazed with a revived keenness in the direction whence it had come. And the next moment he caught sight of his master walking quickly towards him along the lines, by Roger's side the big surgeon in whose charge he was.

"Yes, sir," Roger was explaining. "He is the only horse I have ever owned. I bought him myself—had to save up a good bit to pay for him! Had him with me from the time that I came out until the day we were hit. . . ."

Then, with his hand resting upon Broncho's neck, he listened to the veterinary officer's explanation:

"A case of touch and go. . . . I think I may be proud of his recovery. Of course, it will be some time before he is fit again. But he's steadily improving. Broncho you said his name was, didn't you? Aren't you much better latterly, Broncho, old man?"

And then Roger, running his fingers slowly over Broncho's temples with that motion which the latter had come to know and love, with a few whispered words had tried to thank his horse for all he had done for him on that night of long ago.

"I've got to thank you for a lot, old man! You struggled the whole way home. If you hadn't—well, most likely I shouldn't be here to talk of it to-day."

"Struggled his way right back to the transport lines," he explained to his companion. "Can't think how he managed it—especially now you've told me how bad he was. And one thing, sir, I want you to remember, please, that whenever he's fit again I want to get him back?"

The big man laughed.

"Oh, I'll remember! Broncho's a friend of mine, too. Where's this you say your Regiment is—resting?"

"Yes, and likely to continue to, I should think," answered Roger. "They got a pretty good shaking after I'd got hit."

And thus it was that, when now at length the call had come once again, Broncho was, with his master, ready to answer it.

They reached Bapaume an hour or so after nightfall, bivouacking to the south of the town. And among the gathering forces that had come hurrying up from Albert, southward from Arras and northward from Amiens, rumour ran rife. The German front lines were empty —so Roger was assured. The enemy had been retreating since the beginning of the week. . . .

"And if you ask me," continued a Canadian who was one of Roger's many chance informants, "it's the beginning of the end! They can't hold the line! They've been evacuating their heavy stuff for a month or more. . . . I've been out the last two days. Got as far as their second line. Nothing to be found but fallen-in trenches! But the going's too heavy for us footsloggers. That's why they're bringing the cavalry up."

Roger agreed, glancing beyond his informant at the broken black buildings of the town and at the stars that hung above in the spring-time sky. To him—and more especially at this moment—there was something mysterious about that vista of dark, twisted shapes against the paler sky of the night, and about the lights that came and went with muffled glow, and the darkness that hid the ordered movements of all those hastily gathered men.

"They tell me the Albert road was stiff with cavalry to-day?" The Canadian looked his question.

"We came up this afternoon," answered Roger, "and we're to move out again at daybreak."

"Well, good luck to you, old man—and good hunting!" And with a dry laugh the gaunt figure in the buttoned-up greatcoat swung off down the road.

Roger's glance followed him into the darkness. Then it returned to the indistinct shapes of the town that rose up huddled against the sky. And then, with a glance up at the flickering stars and a thought of what the morrow might hold, he turned back to his bivouac.

Jimmy was alone when he got there, studying the next day's plans. He glanced up with relief as Roger came through the doorway.

"Hullo!" he said, "that you? These have been sent down. Come and have a look at them."

Roger bent over his shoulder towards the table, moving the lantern back a little so that the light did not strike up into his eyes.

"Here we are," explained Jimmy, his finger on the map. "We're to start at daybreak. . . . Not to lose touch! Infantry following . . . and guns. . . ."

Roger nodded. It *did* seem, as the Canadian hinted, not unlike the end!

But Jimmy was not so optimistic—for he had grown severe and practical with the responsibility of war!

"We'll be up against their rearguard all the time," he pointed out. "The old man says his information is that about their lines will be very difficult going, but that once we get beyond them the country is untouched. I'll want you to lead the first patrol. Pick your men—and remember to go slow."

Roger stood upright, with flushed face.

"Right, old man," he said, "and thanks!"

Jimmy glanced up at him questioningly from his rickety stool. Why the thanks, he wondered?

But to no one was Roger going to divulge his determination that Broncho should be the first horse to cross the line!

They set off at daybreak the next morning, skirting Bapaume and feeling their way steadily forward. Behind them followed infantry and guns.

All about them the country lay silent with a sinister peace, a silence broken only at times by the low rumble of the guns up north, where the enemy still stood his ground. Here they could yet find no target.

Sometimes from their right or left came distant sounds of rifle or machine-gun fire, but after a few minutes these would die away.

The day wore on. Mile after mile was covered, yet never an enemy

was to be seen. Often Broncho, champing his bit with growing impatience, looked with longing at long stretches of down that were before him. Yet there was rarely ever a gallop, and then but for a short hundred yards or so when Roger pushed on in answer to the signals of one of his scouts ahead!

In the afternoon, men and horses tired alike, they turned southward a little where the Canal du Nord crossed their path, and Roger, with an impatience equal to Broncho's own, still continued to press onwards, under the influence of the hour that seemed to be urging them to advance and still advance! Then suddenly, through the failing light, a grey figure flitted across the road before him. The enemy? At last! Instantly, almost instinctively, he urged Broncho forward, subconsciously thinking to hear his men thunder up behind. But those grey figures he now saw through the trees were not hurrying in retreat. Fifty yards he rode—alone. Then, with a strange roaring in his ears, a sound of many waters, he swayed in his saddle and crashed blindly to the ground. The merest wisp of smoke drifted into nothingness above the muzzle of a German rifle. A moment or two later, dazed and helpless, he felt himself lifted up by enemy hands, and realised with a deep bitterness that he was a prisoner.

A Night of Terror

Chapter the Thirteenth

BRONCHO, too, had seen that flitting grey form. His eyes, keener than his master's, had noted the "enemy" crouching in the shadow of the trees. But to him, in that unsuspecting moment, the world had held no "enemy," for, thanks to Roger's care and patience, his confidence in mankind had been regained. And then, out of the shadows, there had come that spurt of flame! Through the evening's stillness the sharp crack of a rifle had come to mock at horse and rider. One moment, Broncho had felt his master swaying in the saddle, clutching desperately at the reins. The next, Roger was lying on the ground, a crumpled heap, and he himself was tearing wildly back along the hillside road.

Down through the dusk he tore, terror lending wings to his feet. He had seen those grey figures, vindictive, triumphant, come leaping out of the shadow. And that glimpse of his master, in whom he so trusted, now huddled up in helplessness, that realisation of the destruction wrought upon man by man, in one fell instant swept away every shred of that confidence which had so carefully been rebuilt. With a wild snort of terror he turned and tore away into the dusk—a maniac—his one object flight. . . .

The patrol were riding slowly up the hill, anxiously hoping to come into touch again with their leader. The riderless horse tore through them round a bend of the road, finishing the tale that the sudden rifle shot in the wood had begun. But even as they glanced round in their saddles at him in dismay he had disappeared once more into the dusk, hoof-beats echoing back feverishly through the night, his saddle flapping wildly against his sides as he fled on.

Mile after mile he tore on, swerving from every sound, his heart throbbing hardly beneath his ribs, his breath coming ever and ever

more painfully, his hoofs beating more and more mechanically upon the muddy road. At length, after what seemed to his numbed senses like a lifetime, he realised that he could fly no further. Gradually, unknown to him, his pace had grown slower and slower. At last, with a few heaving breaths, he faltered into a walk, then to a stand, and at last—with head thrust forward and heaving flanks—stood spent and beaten in the darkness, no sound in his ears save the wild beating of his heart.

It was long afterwards that the chill of the spring-time night, penetrating his spent, sweat-drenched body, brought to his numbed senses some realisation of his plight. He was alone, lost in a world of darkness, his every energy exhausted, at the mercy of the old enemy—Man!

The night chill, creeping ever deeper through his exhausted body, urged movement. Once, and then again, he faltered, his knees shaking beneath him when he tried to move. The third time, with an effort, he succeeded in hobbling onward; but his shoulders had stiffened and his feet had grown leaden, and each step seemed to turn every muscle and sinew to a cord of red-hot flame. Yet instinct urged food and shelter! Feebly he tried to crop at the grass beneath his feet, but even that scant herbage seemed to stick in his parched throat. Water! He sniffed at the air, casting his head to left and right questioningly. But there was no water thereabouts that his dulled nostrils could sense. Shelter? A spring-time wind blew over the plateau, but there seemed to be no shelter from it that he could find. And so, spent, stained with mud and sweat, his broken reins trailing the ground about him, he hobbled aimlessly onward through the darkness of the night.

But at last there came a sound through the darkness, the sound of voices, close at hand! With a wild snort of terror Broncho sprang forward, blundering on through the dark. But the next moment something unseen tripped him up and he fell headlong, and, huddled upon the ground, knowing nothing of where he was or how he had come there, sank into complete unconsciousness.

Thus it was that Private Harris of the Lancashires, who in civil life had been in the textile trade, struggling sleepily from beneath the flap of his improvised tent into the mists of early morning, stumbled, in the half-light, across what he plaintively declaimed to be a "bloomin' 'orse."

The sergeant-major, following fussily in answer to his call, looked down in astonishment at Broncho's spent form, stretched stiffly no more than a yard or two beyond their bivouac.

"He weren't there last night, sergeant!" exclaimed Private Harris excitedly. "That I'll go bail!"

"Officer's saddle horse!" quoth the sergeant in his best official manner. "But there don't seem to be no rider?"

"There ain't any," said Private Harris, with conviction. "He's just—loose. . . ."

"Saddled and bridled," continued the sergeant, as though he were making an inventory.

"Strike me!" interrupted Bert Harris excitedly. "He ain't dead after all! Look, he's opened his blinkin' eye!"

The sergeant moved pompously round.

"So he has," he agreed. "So he has." He gazed down stolidly at Broncho, while Broncho, with returning consciousness, gazed blankly up at him. Then, feeling that the situation had grown beyond him, he cleared his throat long and fully. "Well, anyhow it ain't any of our business, young Harris," he decided. "We'd best be going our ways and leave it to them as it belongs to."

Thus it was that, an hour or so later, young Tanner of the A.V.C. came busily along.

"Seen a dead horse, or a half-dead horse?" he queried.

"Yes, sir!" The sergeant saluted briskly. "Just round to the right, sir." And Bert Harris, behind him, jerked his thumb over his shoulder for the information of young Tanner's orderly, and nodded at the sergeant's back and slowly winked one eye.

Young Tanner strode rapidly round, and halted a pace or two from

where Broncho lay. The mystery that had intrigued Bert Harris and puzzled the sergeant did not strike him. What his professional instincts allowed him to see was an utterly spent horse. He looked back at his following orderly. He then looked at the conformation of the ground. He fingered the humane destroyer in his tunic pocket.

"Could load him there quite easily," he said to himself, "so I suppose it would be most merciful to put a bullet through the poor brute."

He came forward a pace. He bent down and drew slightly upward with his fingers the loose skin of Broncho's lip. He glanced at the swollen tongue. He bent his head and listened carefully to the faint beating of the horse's heart. "Yes," he decided, "as well to put an end to him." He turned and motioned the orderly to get the saddle and bridle off, and taking the destroyer out of his pocket quietly slipped a bullet home.

The orderly struggled with muddy straps; at last, with a tug, the saddle came loose in his hands. And then, as young Tanner came forward, with an effort Broncho suddenly stood up.

Young Tanner paused, the destroyer in his hand. He gazed in mute astonishment at the horse, who stood trembling with exhaustion in front of him. And then, as he glanced at the suffering, lacklustre eye, something seemed to creep into it that he took to be the desire for life. And since, deep down, he was very human, he slipped that destroyer back into his pocket again.

"Well, I shan't pass sentence on you, at any rate," he said under his breath.

Then he glanced round at his orderly.

"It seems to be a case for the hospital," he said.

Pure Nerves . . .!

Chapter the Fourteenth

AT the Base, as time went on, Broncho began to achieve a fresh reputation. He had become the *protégé* of the hospital section-commander, Captain Willoughby. After many months of care, he was known to the staff in general as "Willoughby's Wonder," and his protector's "misdirected" enthusiasm had become one of the standing jokes of the Mess. But Captain Willoughby was as good-humoured as he was enthusiastic, which was just as well for his juniors—for they openly laughed at his interest in Broncho, and refused blankly to see the improvement which he told them the horse was making.

Captain Willoughby was very keen on his profession. He was also a good judge of a horse, and very slow to acknowledge himself wrong. The joints and tendons battered in Broncho's wild night gallop proved a long job, but in time they became "Not perhaps A 1"—to quote Captain Willoughby himself—"but fit to stand a lot of work." But the nervous exhaustion proved another matter. It seemed as though Broncho was refusing to get well!

Such, at any rate, was the impression of the hospital staff. The section-commander, however, had ideas of his own. "A matter of time," he explained good-humouredly. "A matter of time. It's an extremely interesting case."

"If old Willoughby'd any sense he'd put a bullet through the brute." Such was the stated opinion of the junior staff. And the casual observer, coming upon Broncho in his stall, might, pardonably, have decided that they were right. He looked gaunt and wasted, even after many months of care. His eye lacked lustre. His coat stood on end. For the most part he was docile—with the docility of exhaustion. But sometimes he had incontrollable fits of what the staff held to be bad

A matter of time. It is an extremely interesting case

temper. Sometimes he ate ravenously. Sometimes he broke into violent sweatings and refused to look at food.

"A most interesting case," Captain Willoughby lectured his staff. "You have here a very high-couraged horse. Quality quite out of the ordinary. When he came here he was suffering from the effects of hard usage. The joints and tendons have yielded to treatment. The horse has been well cared for, and by every test we can apply is in a normal, healthy condition. But he refuses to thrive as one would wish. There's obviously something wrong. And in my opinion it's mental rather than physical."

Invariably his audience looked straight ahead of them—without so much as the flicker of an eyelid to express their thoughts.

"I don't mean," the lecturer always continued pointedly, "that the horse is *mad*. There undoubtedly are cases of complete insanity. But this is not one of them. There are no symptoms of insanity at all. In my opinion this is a particularly intelligent horse—but he has been through some experiences which he has not yet got over. The only treatment possible is continued rest, kindness, and time."

And such, despite the scepticism of the Mess, was in reality the truth. It was not what he had suffered bodily, but what he had mentally undergone, that Broncho was suffering from still. Those sweatings, those fits of temper, all came from the dark memories of that night of terror. Beneath those dread attacks of fear he was powerless. They came upon him at all moments, by day and by night, in the stable and out, but most often in the company of man. For not only the sufferings of that ghastly night, but all that he had undergone during his life, all that his trust in Roger had caused him to forget, had, in that fell moment when he had seen his master lying huddled on the ground, come back again to haunt his brain. And when those terror-stricken interludes shook his enfeebled frame he was powerless to see men other than as his enemies, powerless to distinguish even his obvious friends. Thus it was that to Captain Willoughby's faith he gave such indifferent justification.

"I ride him about myself," the latter explained. "I've been careful never to let any of the grooms up on him. He's a beautiful ride, beautiful—or, I should say, must one day have been! And, despite his looks, he's equal to a certain amount of quiet work. But he has odd moments, very odd. . . . Shivers! Sweats! Gets sort of stubborn! And if you do anything with him he becomes a raving lunatic. . . ."

It was one of those odd moments, the Mess decided, that must have given old Willoughby the noticeably stiff leg with which he appeared one evening. To all inquiries he had said shortly that it was just a slight twist of the knee. The horse had reared up and fallen back. And he had rather pointedly ridden Broncho out to exercise the next morning.

Among his juniors discussion arose as to which would come sooner, Broncho's cure or the end of the war. The odds were held to be upon the war, and in course of time they were duly "landed." The point of discussion then became "what old Willoughby would do with the Wonder now that peace had come?"

But, contrary to all expectation, he did nothing. He was ordered for service abroad. To his enthusiastic nature it meant another "Chance"—a chance which outbalanced even the continuation of his study of Broncho. Yet to several of the juniors, in whom he believed he had detected talent, he spoke singly about continuing that study which he was forced to abandon.

"Look here!" he invariably began, puffing away at his pipe. "You ought to buy out that old horse. He'll be cast at the next parade. Must be—nervous debility and vice! Would have been long ago if I hadn't wangled it. He'll be sold for a few pounds to some benighted dealer's tout, and that'll be the end of his career. You ought to buy him. He's just the horse for a young fellow like you who's keen on his job. Most interestin' case! Case of nerves, my dear man, pure nerves! And he's coming right, coming—though slowly. . . . If you bought him to no more than study the case he'd be

worth it, and when he comes right—though his legs aren't quite all they might be—you'd have the sort of horse you won't get every day."

But nobody would take the chance. One and all shrugged their shoulders and advised someone else to "make old Willoughby happy by havin' a try at the Wonder." Thus it was that, shipped back in a draft from France, inspected at the depot in England by people who knew nothing about him, Broncho found himself one morning making one of a large party of the rejected whose destination was the auction mart of the neighbouring country town.

It was a very doleful looking procession that started down the long, straight road from the depot. Young Harrison, the subaltern in charge, surveyed them with a dissatisfied eye as he rode slowly behind. The pace was, of necessity, a crawl, for the majority of the "casters" were either broken down or broken-winded. And Broncho, one of the "led" horses—for no man was going to ride a horse which had gained a reputation for being troublesome—looked in good health by comparison with his companions. But young Harrison, feeling to make sure that his papers were in his pocket, regarded him with an unappreciative eye.

"That sort," he thought to himself, "always make more trouble than all the rest. All the touts come trying to worm out of you the reason why they're being cast."

His prophecy proved very true. The draft had scarcely been tied up in their stalls before the first prospective customer sidled up to him.

"That brown horse, sir! Lot Fourteen! He's all right in his wind, ain't he, sir?"

"I know nothing about him," said young Harrison severely. "They're all sold without any guarantee."

The sharp-faced man nodded, meditatively picking his teeth with a straw. But when young Harrison ostensibly turned his back, and he saw that there was nothing more to be gained from that quarter,

he himself turned in the opposite direction—back to have another look at Lot Fourteen!

There he found several of his own acquaintances.

"Well, Joe"—so they greeted him—"that's not a bad lookin' old nag. What's the crab this time? There don't seem to be much as you can see."

"No, there don't," agreed Joe. "But there is—bet your life! These 'ere chaps don't make a blob too or'fen."

The friends nodded, strolling off in their several directions, each determined to, when the others were out of the way, go back and see what more they could find out about the brown horse.

Joe Pitcher, however, was back first. With a quick, eel-like movement he sidled into the horse's stall. With a covert glance over his shoulder he ran his fingers quickly down along joints and tendons. He looked at Broncho's teeth, examined his eyes—shading off the light with his loudly checked cap—picked up his feet one by one, ran his hand down the horse's neck and over his ribs, and finally, picking up the short stick he had laid in the straw when he had come in, he made a quick lunge in Broncho's direction to see if he grunted. But Broncho did not react to the test. There seemed nothing wrong there. And so Joe, stepping out into the gangway again, and strolling carelessly away, decided that the trouble must be "Vice." And upon those, more than any other, grounds the authorities sometime made a "blob"; Joe had proved it—to his own profit. And so he decided, if the horse "came reasonable," to "take a chance." He thought he knew of a fellow he could "pass him on" to.

Thus it was that, when the auctioneer had finished holding forth upon the varied qualities of Lot Fourteen: "ex-cavalry horse; full of quality; carry you to hounds, gentlemen" (laughter); "or might win you a good race . . ." (voice from the back, "Make it the Grand National, guv'nor!"), a quiet little man in a check cap and a knotted red muffler bid a determined three guineas.

More than one of the knowing ones glanced round; Joe, they saw,

was "on the job." And since, in business, Joe was hard to beat, and "treated you fair if you treated him fair," several of them hurriedly changed their minds and decided not to bid against him. Thus it was that competition was not so keen as it might otherwise have proved, though there was sufficient to advance Broncho's price to ten guineas.

"Ten guineas, I'm bid," announced the auctioneer, aware, with a side glance, of Joe's ostensibly turned back. "Surely you're not going to let such a high-class horse go at that, gentlemen? Surely somebody's going to give me another half-guinea?"

But he seemed to know that he was fighting a losing battle. His demand for that extra half-guinea seemed to float forlornly upon the air. And thus it was that he very soon descended to the announcement that the horse was "Going . . . going . . . and, for the third time, GOING. HAMMER! . . . The bid, I think, sir"—with a dive of his arm over the top of the rostrum in Joe's direction—"was yours?"

"Right you be, guv'nor," admitted Joe, swinging round again, hands in his pockets, at the decisive moment. And then he seemed once more to lose all interest in the proceedings, gazing abstractedly at the ceiling above the auctioneer's bald head.

But that evening he brought Broncho home to what he called his "own place," and by the end of the week had found out practically all there was to know about him. And the next day there arrived Larry Foley, a tall, thin, rather red-faced man in pepper-and-salt riding breeches and a very greasy bowler hat. Larry Foley spoke with a South of Ireland accent, and referred continually to someone whom he called "me brother Bill." Bill lived at home on the farm in Tipperary which Larry had deserted in his youth to make that fortune horse coping which so far had never come; and it was for Bill that he most frequently did business with Joe Pitcher.

They knew one another well. And when Joe began, "Here's a horse that 'll likely suit you. His legs 'll do—though I won't say they wouldn't be the better of a bit of rest. He's funny about his temper,

but I'd say he'd come all right," Larry believed him. But when he added, "He cost me the best part of twenty pounds down in Reading, so if you can't rise to five-and-twenty I'll have to try to pass him on to someone else," the other knew that the moment to be firm had arrived.

"Five-and-twenty!" he exclaimed, in accents in which dismay and astonishment were well blent, "I haven't it—no, nor the colour of it! And there isn't another fellow in the country, Joe Pitcher, that 'ud ever have the cheek to open his mouth as wide as that."

Over Joe Pitcher's sharp features there spread the suspicion of a smile.

"Draw it mild, man!" he advised. "Draw it mild!"

"Now, supposin'," Larry explained, "I sent that horse home to me brother Bill it 'ud cost the best part of a five pound note. And then he'd take a year out on the bog to come to himself! And then you'd have to find a mug to take a fancy to him! And then you'd have to be ready to sell him at the inside of thirty pounds."

"I know," Joe agreed wearily. "I know. You've told me all that every time you've come here. But this is a horse that 'll suit you down to the ground. You might cash this fellow one day for a blinkin' hundred or more. And if I can't get more than I paid for him—well, with me he'll have to stop!"

"I'll give you a ten pound note," said Larry.

"You'll do no such thing," answered Joe.

"Well, then"—Larry's small eyes travelled quickly in Broncho's direction, but what he was trying to estimate was not how much Broncho might be worth, but how much Joe had paid for him—"well, then, I'll make it twelve pounds, clear?"

Joe shook his head.

"Fourteen. . . .?"

"I couldn't"—non-committally.

"Fifteen, then. . . .?"

Joe's growing interest became more noticeable.

"Tell you what," said Larry, with a final flash of intuition, "fifteen down—and a fiver if he does us any good?"

But if Larry knew Joe, Joe also knew Larry.

"Cut that last part out, old son," he advised, "and plank another two quid on the table. Then we'll call it a deal."

Slowly Larry counted out the money.

"You're squeezing me dry this time," he announced ruefully, but, nevertheless, he admitted that the "old horse" mightn't "do too bad with Bill."

Thus it was that Broncho, bearing many traces of the hardships of the past, found himself returning once more to the land of his birth.

Danny and Broncho

Chapter the Fifteenth

HANDS in his pockets, tattered cap on the back of his head, Danny Keogh, Bill Foley's "boy of all work," came whistling into the yard one February morning.

"Hi!" called a voice behind his back.

"Sir?" he answered, springing round.

"There's a horse to come off the half-nine train," ordered Bill. "You'll go to meet him when you get your work done."

"Right, sir!" answered Danny. "What's he—a ridin' horse? Will I want to bring a bridle?"

"I dunno," said Bill. "He's a horse that's comin' over from me brother Larry."

Danny nodded wisely. He hoped it would be a "ridin'" horse. There'd been nothing in the place these many months, and he'd been "lonesome" for a hunt! And so, in good time, he set off briskly along the road to the town.

Undersized, freckled-faced, red-haired, Danny fed the pigs and chopped the wood and did all the odd jobs about the farm; but his heart was given to the horses—even such as came and went through Bill's hands. And now, since Bill himself had got too heavy, he had been promoted to the position of stable "jock," and so he hoped very ardently that the new horse would be something he could ride about.

Still whistling, he eventually arrived at the station. "Got a horse waitin' for me, Jack?" he inquired from the porter.

The latter, sitting on the booking-office window-sill, nodded slowly.

"There's something beyond in the box."

"Come along then, me son," said Danny. "I've got no time to spare."

Jack the porter roused himself.

"Shut up your chat, Danny Keogh," he advised.

But Danny dodged from the cuff that accompanied the advice, and set off whistling down the platform. He scrambled into the box, and stretched out a grimy hand to the dark object that stood shivering in its depths.

Softly he spoke to the stranger.

"What's ailin' you? You needn't be a-feard of me. Come here, me son, and let me put the bridle on you. . . ." Then, through the half open door to Jack the porter, "Faith, this old skin's half dead of fright!"

At last the bridle was on. At last the porter let down the door. At last Broncho blundered out into the sunlight, and Danny could take stock of his charge. All at once his heart gave a bound.

"A grand horse!" he announced. "A grand horse! But he's afraid of his mortal life. Look, Jack, I can scarcely get me hand on him!"

Yet he did. Shivering violently, at last Broncho allowed that grimy paw to stroke his shoulder.

Danny glanced round in triumph, but there was no praise forthcoming from Jack the porter.

"Take himself and yourself off out of this," the latter advised, "and don't be cutting up all the station yard."

Bill Foley's fifty acres stretched upwards across the hillside, and about midway up the white, thatched farmhouse stood, facing southward across the sloping valley towards the mountains. As Broncho walked slowly into the farmyard he glanced about him with a dull apprehension. But though there was much which seemed strange there was nothing to prove alarming. On the contrary, all the farmyard inhabitants seemed contented to a degree. The fowls scarcely troubled to move from beneath his tired feet. And a sow and her family, searching the manure heap methodically, never even looked up.

At the farmhouse door Danny halted, raising his tattered cap to run his fingers through his shock of red hair.

"Are you there, Mrs. Foley?" he shouted. "Is himself within?"

In answer, a tall woman emerged, the fowls hurrying across the yard to meet her as she appeared at the door.

"No, he isn't," she answered slowly. "He's away up the hill." And then, with an increase of interest, she added: "And so that's the horse from England?"

"That's him," Danny agreed.

"The creature!" she exclaimed; "you can see every bone in his body! Can't you put him in the stable now and come in till I give you your dinner? Himself can see him when he comes down."

"So he can," assented Danny. He took another quick glance at his charge. "He's no bad cut of a horse either, Mrs. Foley. Jack, below at the station, was sayin' he was grand."

Mrs. Foley paused on her way back towards the house.

"Grand, how are you!" she said, glancing round again. "Shure, they're all grand until something goes wrong with them. Only you mightn't tell himself that!"

Danny laughed lightly, giving a jerk to the reins.

"Come along, me son," he said, turning to Broncho. And as he slipped the bridle off a moment later in the darkness of the stable he added, with a final friendly pat on the horse's shoulder: "You needn't be a-feard of me. You and me'll have to get friends!" Then he hastily made his way in to his dinner.

But he was no more than halfway through a huge mouthful of potato before heavy footsteps on the cobble-stones of the yard told him that "himself" was coming in.

"Bad luck to it!" he said with a grimace, glancing at the clock on the kitchen dresser. "He'll scarcely give me time to swallow a bit before he has me out again paradin' out the horse!"

Such proved the case.

"Are you there, Mrs Foley?" he shouted "is himself within?"

"Well, did you get him?" was Bill Foley's first question.

"Yes, sir," answered Danny, his mouth very full.

"And you're not long back?"

"Only come this minute!"

"I suppose you spent the whole mornin' gallivantin' down at the station? Hurry up now and come out an' put a rope on him till I see him. What sort of a horse is he, anyway?"

"Ah! grand, sir," answered Danny. "He's grand."

Bill turned away with the heavy footsteps of later middle age. About that, he thought, he'd have to decide for himself! But sometimes, he admitted, he didn't do too badly with the horses that came over from Larry. If they weren't sound enough to make a price for him, they sometimes won a few pounds!

Slowly he made his way out again. In appearance he was a stouter and shorter edition of his brother, despite the complete absence of the obvious "horsiness"—the pepper-and-salt breeches, the low-crowned bowler hat—which made part of Larry's stock-in-trade. But he had the same small, cute blue eye, that "eye for a horse" which was hereditary in them both. And it came to rest approvingly, that afternoon, upon Broncho.

"Grand cut of an old horse," Bill mused slowly. "Quality! Best I saw comin' here this long time." Slowly he bent down and ran his hand along Broncho's tendons. "But them legs 'ud do with a bit of a rest. I'll clap a bit of a blister on him an' let him out down below on the bog."

He straightened his back again, and adjusted his greasy hat on to his forehead.

"Bring me the can of gas tar," he ordered Danny.

He held the halter in one hand, noting with a shrewd eye Broncho's lacklustre gaze and weary expression, while Danny hurried across the yard and came back again with the can.

"Now," he ordered, "dip in your hand, and clap it on to his legs."

Danny dipped. Breathing earnestly, he smeared Broncho's legs heavily from the knee down to the fetlock. Then he paused, glancing back questioningly at his employer.

"Will that do, sir?"

Bill nodded.

"Well enough. Clean your hands, an' catch a-hold of him."

A moment later Danny came back again.

"Will I put him back in the stable, sir?" he questioned, taking hold of the rope.

"You will not," answered Bill with slow emphasis.

"What then——?" The boy stood irresolute, the halter rope swinging loose from his hand.

"Oh, bring him down to the bog, can't you, and let him out with the others."

"What, now, sir?" protested Danny, "an' he only after comin' off the train!"

"Yes, now," said Bill shortly. "Do you think there's time here to spend doctorin' him? And when you come back don't be long about goin' up to pick the stones off the new grass field."

Danny went—very slowly, Broncho dragging along wearily behind. In the big field down by the river that was known as "the bog," he finally slipped the halter off the old horse's head.

"Well, take care of yourself now," he whispered affectionately. "If you want your fill here you'll have to warm yourself lookin' for it. But I'll bring you down a handful of something whenever I get the chance." And Broncho, looking back at him, almost seemed as if he understood.

Very slowly Danny walked up again to the yard. In imagination he had seen himself spend that spring, perched upon Broncho's back, riding about the roads to the envy of his fellows, but instead it would seem that his immediate task was to be many dreary days stone-picking in the new grass field!

"An' I hoped," he confided to Mrs. Foley that evening as he

drank his tea, "that come the first of May I'd be ridin' him below at the races."

"Races; how are you?" answered Mrs. Foley with asperity. "It 'ud answer you better if you saw about keeping the sow out of the garden!"

But Bill's treatment, drastic though it may have seemed, served Broncho in good stead. Abrupt though the change had been, the keen winds of spring revived his failing vitality. The turfy bog pasture was soft to his tired feet. The short, sweet grass that came with spring gave tone to his worn system. March passed. April gave place to May. A greenness came upon the countryside. The hedges burst forth into leaf. The hawthorn blossomed white. From the woods came the cuckoo's mocking call. In the reeds by the riverside the waterfowl hatched out their young. And down in the long narrow field that ran along by the river Broncho continued to grow strong, spending the sunny days in a lazy luxuriance, in company with the old grey mare, and the two-year-old that had been fired, and the chestnut horse with the curby hocks.

Very often Danny stole down to see him, and his ragged pocket never failed to hold a few handfuls of oats. And so, gradually, amid the peace and quiet of the summer-time countryside—so different from the noisy routine of the East Range lines, where all Captain Willoughby's care had gone unrequited!—those dark memories of the past began once more to fade. Less and less often did those old terrors come back to trouble him, and as he grew stronger he was more able to shake them off when they did. And gradually, too, amid the quiet of those fields, which were so like those in which long ago he had been foaled and reared, there was borne upon him the realisation that once more he had a friend. He came to listen for Danny's blithe whistle behind the hedge, to prick his ears in greeting as the quick footsteps came towards him across the grass. And as their friendship grew, often, in the cool of the summer evenings as Danny crouched by the

river bank, watching the trout nibble at his line, from behind his back would come the sound of Broncho's quiet footsteps, and the next moment the horse's nose would come sniffing at his pockets. And since to Danny Broncho now meant more than all the trout that lurked in the pools, rod and line would be abandoned until he had had his talk with the horse.

What talks those were! What day-dreams were woven of the day when together they would "come trottin' home at the point-to-point!" And Broncho, gazing with wise eyes at the freckled face beneath the ragged cap, felt that for Danny he would do a great deal. His old strength had returned. The long months of rest, the peaceful surroundings, the lush luxuriance of the summer's grass, had one and all played their parts—as had Bill Foley's blistering to his joints and tendons! Danny, running his thin fingers down the horse's legs, used to murmur his hopes beneath his breath. "Clean as a whistle," he assured himself. "Faith, there isn't so much as a mark on one of them! Stand work, is it? Faith, they'd stand all the work in the world!" And jerking his red forelock back off his forehead again he would look up at Broncho with admiring eyes. "Aye, bags of it, old son!" he would murmur, stroking the horse's muzzle with grimy hand.

One afternoon towards the end of August Bill himself came down to the bog. He had often come before, upon his general round of the farm. But this time there seemed to be a new purposefulness about his steady stride, a new expression in his shrewd blue eye. He came straight across the field to where Broncho was grazing. The horse, hearing the heavy footsteps approach, looked up at him with questioning gaze.

Bill looked him over long and carefully, noted the strong, clean legs from which the blister had peeled away, noted the returned confidence with which he once again held up his head.

"He ought to stand now," he said to himself. "I'll try him for a month or two, anyway."

He walked slowly round, looking at the horse from every angle. Broncho's summer coat completely hid his old shrapnel scars.

"Begad," mused Bill, "you wouldn't know he was the same horse. That's where the oats was going, I'll go bail!" But maybe he thought it would be no harm! The horse looked like having a chance in him. Anyway, he'd let Danny knock him about for a bit. . . . The young lad wouldn't ask better, and he was a good sort of young lad if he was kept in his place! Not but that—all the summer—he hadn't been able to get any satisfaction out of him as to what had been happening to the oats!

The Old Trouble?

Chapter the Sixteenth

THUS it was that, as September came, and the golden of the waving cornfields that had checkered the hillside gave place to the paler shades of the reaped stubble, as the purple of the distant mountains deepened in tone, and by the trout stream the tall brown bullrushes stood sentinel, one morning Danny came whistling down, a sieve of oats in one work-roughened hand, a head-collar slung across his ragged shoulder.

"Come along, me lad!" he called to Broncho as the horse walked slowly towards him for the oats that he always brought. "Come along. Put your nose into this collar. You're to come back up along to the yard. And many a good day you and I'll have this winter together!"

Danny's spirits were very infectious. Broncho stepped by his side with all his old-time energy along the stony lane that led up to the yard. He suffered himself—since Danny assured him earnestly that he would come to "no harm"—to be led in through the low doorway of the stable. And round its dark interior he gazed with questioning eyes, while his attendant, busily putting hay in the rack and oats in the manger, apologised for its not being better than it was.

"I wanted himself," he explained, *sotto voce,* "to let me take them old boards down out of the window. 'It's that dark,' says I, 'that you can't see to dress a horse inside.'

"'What matter,' says he, 'if he's well in himself an' he comin' out of it!'

"'That old manger's wore out, sir,' says I; 'you ought to let me go down and get one of them pots that's below in the shop?'

"'Divil a foot!' says he. 'Go get a handful of nails and cobble

it up again. It done many a good horse before this, so it can well do another.'

"'It's what people's sayin', sir,' says I, 'that yourself 's the queer man to go keepin' classy horses side by side with the cows!'

"'Hold your chat, Danny Keogh,' says he to me. 'When I want to learn me business it's not yourself I'll ask!'"

Danny paused, laughing softly at his recollections while he wisped at Broncho's quarters.

"Oh! himself's the queer man," he assured the horse. "Terrible severe! But for all that he's got a good drop in him. He'd never do a person a dirty turn. An' he's clever about a horse, real clever! But, believe you me, it's meself an' yourself that'll have the good times when the huntin' comes along!"

At length the first week of November came, and hounds met at the cross-roads at the bottom of the hill.

"Will I take him down, sir?" Danny asked eagerly the day before.

Bill led the way to the stable before he replied.

"Yes," he said eventually, "he's not lookin' too bad at all. It 'ud do him no harm. But you'll have to go quiet! No batterin' them legs on the roads, mind!"

"Oh no, sir!" said Danny earnestly. "Shure I know better than that!"

And very proudly the next morning he rode down the hill. His boots were polished, his coat was brushed, and his ragged cap was set at an angle. But much more time had been spent on Broncho's toilet! The muscle rippled beneath his satin coat.

More than one keen eye noted his progress as Danny walked him up and down through the crowd. More than one voice might be heard asking, "What's that that Bill Foley's red-haired boy is riding?" And more than one shrewd judge sought to estimate what "that horse might be worth if he was all right."

Danny sat erect in his saddle, eyes gazing beyond the horse's

pricked ears, as though unconscious of the interest he was arousing. Yet not a glance, not a question—scarcely, almost, a thought!—was lost to him. With his knees gripped tight and one hand carelessly stroking Broncho's shoulder, the triumph of the moment was his. "Rich gentlemen and ladies, well-to-do farmers," not one of them was riding as high-class a horse as was his! And when at length hounds moved off and a momentary flicker of the old-time impatience awoke within Broncho, Danny curbed it with a light, firm hand.

"Steady, old son! Steady!" he whispered, bending forward to stroke the horse's neck.

And behind him, as he rode at the end of the cavalcade that wound along the road, the country boys ran, calling out remarks of envious derision. "Hold your hold, Danny Keogh!" they shouted. "Faith, if he threw you, you'd never be got!" And Danny, glancing over his shoulder, laughed with malicious glee, and loosed his horse's head a little so that he threw up his heels with an old-time exuberance, scattering the crowd that ran along behind.

The first draw was a small larch plantation upon the side of the opposite hill. Hounds scrambled in across its surrounding wall at a wave of the master's arm. A moment later, upon the further side, a small brown object stole quietly away—the fox who had given them so many good runs the previous season!

Broncho saw him go, and a wild recurrence of old-time excitement sent a quivering through every muscle of his frame. Danny saw him too, and, standing in his stirrups, uttered a wild "view hulloa."

"Shut up that row!" said the first whip severely, galloping hurriedly past. But the next moment the master reined in with a question:

"Hey, boy!" he called quickly, "where did you see him go?"

"There, sir, there!" Danny pointed eagerly.

And the next moment the pack came tumbling out again across the wall.

The first bank was wide and green

Broncho thrilled deep with excitement. Memories of long ago came hurriedly following one another through his brain. What joy it was once again to hear the cry of hounds, to see the green fields stretch away before one—and the banks that he remembered jumping years before! With a snatch at his bit he set off behind the pack, striding down across the sloping field. Danny's weight was as nothing in the saddle. Danny's hands were perfect on the reins, and Danny's spirit—the spirit of that freckled smile and those cheerful bright blue eyes—was at one with Broncho's own in the desire to keep as near as might be to the flying hounds!

The first bank rose up, wide and green, before them. Broncho caught it as lightly as he had done as a four-year-old years before. The second they soon left behind them, and the third. Then they swung right-handed and came striding down to the river, crossed it and made their way up through the ploughed field upon its further side. Nearer and nearer to the front Broncho drew. More than once Danny was conscious of surprised glances as he passed.

But despite the joy of the moment he did not forget his instructions—not to give the horse too much. And so, when at length they came out on to a road, he pulled up and turned soberly for home. "Enough is enough!" he assured himself, as he leaned forward to stroke Broncho's sweat-streaked shoulder. A little further on he slipped to the ground, slackened the girths and pushed the saddle back.

"That'll let you cool," he told the horse, "and you're the best I've ever ridden, me son, though I wonder if the boss'll believe that?"

But to Danny's surprise it seemed as though he did. With a complacent smile he had watched them come up the laneway to the yard, Danny walking at his horse's head.

"Never put a foot wrong, sir," he assured Bill. "And his stride's that long he eats up the fields."

Bill nodded, walking slowly round the horse.

"There isn't," Danny assured him, "as much as a scratch on him."

"Well, if so," said "himself" complacently, "you can take him out some other day again."

Then he turned into the house.

"The young lad's back with the horse," he told his wife as he slowly puffed at his pipe. "He says he couldn't go better with him. He's a good lad enough, and he's a way with that horse. Now, when I go into the stable meself it's as much as I can do to get me hand on him!"

Such was the fact. Broncho's confidence in Danny did not seem to be extended to Danny's master—and the fact was a puzzling one to Bill.

"I never did anything to him," he assured himself, "but shure horses is strange—stranger than Christians!"—impossible for Bill to know that he himself very slightly resembled the red-faced man who had been the first cause of Broncho's misfortunes!—"but when he's goin' well for the young lad I may as well leave him to him!"

This being the case meant that Danny's care was redoubled. He spent every spare moment in seeing to Broncho's wants. In feeding, exercising, grooming, all other considerations were overborne by that of what would be "best for the horse." And every now and then, very proudly, he rode Broncho carefully out to hounds. The good feeding, the regular exercise, the long hours spent in devoted dressing, had brought back an old-time sheen to Broncho's coat, and old-time vigour to his muscle. And Danny's light hand upon the rein, gentle and confident, gave back to the horse his old courage, as the banks rose high in front of him, and steadied his impetuosity as he strode along in the wake of hounds. Once more he achieved a reputation. And people began to look so keenly at him that at length Danny became afraid.

"I hope, old son," he told Broncho, as they wended their way home one afternoon, "that none of them 'll ask the price of you. If

the boss gets an offer he'll sell. And that 'ud be the last I'd see of you, and I can tell you that wouldn't please me!"

And Broncho, walking soberly along by Danny's side, looked at him with wise eyes that seemed to say that they understood, and that he, too, was happy in Danny's company and Danny's care.

Certainly he seemed to be. He knew Danny's footstep crossing the yard. He whinnied a welcome every time it drew near the stable door. But of the others, Mick, the man of all work, and Bill Foley himself, he still seemed inexplicably nervous. The fact continued to puzzle Bill. But he comforted himself by the reflection that the horse was improving every day, and that sooner or later—with a hopeful emphasis on the "sooner"—he must "catch somebody's eye."

And very soon that hope was fulfilled. The next time Danny rode out to hounds he heard a loud voice hailing him, and at that hail his heart sunk low:

"Hi! young fellow!" it called, "isn't that Mr. Foley's horse? Turn him round till I have a look at him."

"Yes, sir," answered Danny, obediently turning Broncho round.

"Not a bad sort of horse," said the big round-faced man condescendingly. "How old is he? Do you know how he's bred?"

"No, sir," said Danny. "He came to us from England."

"Well, I suppose he's for sale? Will you tell Mr. Foley I'll call round to-morrow to have a look at him?"

"Very well, sir," answered Danny, in crestfallen tones—for the big man was the best-known dealer in that part of the country! "If he wants you he'll get you," he told Broncho as they made their way home that day. "A pound or two won't stop him. If he makes up his mind you'll suit him it 'll be the last of you I'll see."

And the next morning the big man's motor drove early into the yard.

"Grand morning, sir," said Bill Foley, with heavy affability.

"That old horse you have," explained the other. "I think he'd suit a customer of mine."

"He's a good-looking horse, sir," said Bill, "and improving. You might have seen the young lad ridin' him out to the hounds?"

The other nodded.

"I did. I did! Where did you get him?"

"Me brother Larry sent him over to me from England," explained Bill.

"Quiet, is he?"

"Quiet as a lamb."

And at that moment, a pattern of docility, Broncho walked out of his stable into the yard. Danny's grief at the prospect of losing him had spent itself in an orgy of dressing. Broncho's coat shone. And the big man, viewing him from one angle after another, thought: "By Jove, he's even a better stamp than I'd realised. I wonder how much Foley wants for him?" Then, glancing across at Danny, he ordered:

"Get up and canter him round the field out there."

Danny jumped into the saddle. He cantered Broncho round the field. And it would seem that Broncho, too, realised the importance of the occasion, for never had he strode along more proudly or arched his neck to the bit with greater confidence!

"Good mover," said the big man. He turned to Bill. "How much are you asking for him?"

"Two hundred pounds, sir," said Bill, with a quick, shrewd glance.

"Well"—holding up a hand to bid Danny pull the horse up—"I'll just have a turn on him myself."

Obediently Broncho stood still while he climbed into the saddle. Methodically he found his irons and reins. And then, with a nod to Danny standing at the horse's head, and a "Let him go, boy," he urged Broncho to walk down the field. But was it some memory of the past that the unknown hand upon the rein awoke, or merely Danny's prophesying of the day before that if he suited they must part?—at any rate, back went the horse's ears and rigid grew his

body. The big man caught a shorter hold of his reins, and pressed a heel to the horse's flank.

"Walk on, horse," he ordered, but Broncho refused to move.

"Walk on!"

Still no response.

He struck the horse smartly with his cane. The next moment one heave of those powerful quarters had sent him rolling on to the turf, and Broncho was trotting with swinging reins back to where Danny stood waiting.

The big man picked himself up.

"You're not hurt, sir?" inquired Bill, hurrying over.

"Oh, no . . . no! Not in the least! But I'm afraid the horse wouldn't suit me. I want a perfectly quiet horse."

"I never saw him do the like before," Bill assured him.

"Yes, I dare say. But still, I'm afraid he wouldn't do."

"It's a mystery. He's as quiet as a lamb with the young lad. . . ."

The dealer nodded.

"Still, I'm afraid he wouldn't suit. I'm sorry. Good-bye."

". . . A mystery," Bill continued to his wife, when eventually he returned to the kitchen. "I can't make out what could have upset him. And there looked to be as good as a hundred and fifty pounds into me hand!" he lamented.

But Danny, in the darkness of the stable, rejoiced!

Friends Meet

Chapter the Seventeenth

AND, as events proved, that "mystery" continued to make itself apparent from time to time. The following week another buyer arrived, and the week after that another; but to each of them Broncho gave such proof of his old-time bad behaviour that neither of them would bid for him. The first he threw in the paddock, just as he had thrown the round-faced man. The second he would not allow even to get into the saddle, plunging wildly from Danny's hand whenever the stranger approached.

Danny was as greatly mystified about the proceedings as Bill, though for a time his employer was prone to suspect him.

"You're not doing anything to the horse?" he questioned sharply more than once.

"Oh no, sir! No!" Danny assured him. "I can't tell what's come over him at all. He'll let me do anything with him meself just the same as ever."

Bill slowly nodded his head.

"He was always a bit strange with meself," he argued, "but he seems real strange with strangers! But shure, didn't he come to us with that sort of a reputation? And if he won't do a good turn one way, maybe he will another. Do you think he'd pick up a race at the point-to-point?"

"Sure to, sir," said Danny, with solemn eyes.

"Well, don't spare the feedin' on him, and give him nice steady work. And one of these days we'll try how he'll do a bit of a gallop."

Eventually that day came. One morning Bill walked into the stable.

"Clap a saddle on him, Danny," he said, "and bring him out to the big field. It's good and dry, and I'd like to see him doin' a bit of a gallop."

With shining eyes Danny hurried to obey. He whistled as he girthed Broncho up.

"Now you can show all the good that's in you," he told the horse, running his hand down his muzzle before he sprang into the saddle.

With head erect Broncho walked down to the "big field." Obediently he strode off into a canter. And as Danny, crouching in approved style upon his wither, eased his head, the length of his stride increased; and Bill, standing watching, nodded slow approval.

Round and round the horse strode. The third time Bill raised his hand, and Danny stood upright in his stirrups, slowing Broncho up to await his master's verdict.

"He went well with you," said Bill—"well enough," as with head on one side he listened to the horse's wind. "Was he strong under you now, Danny?"

"Terrible strong, sir," answered Danny.

"But you could hold him?"

"Oh, I'd hold him all right, but he gallops powerful. He's just like one of them engines. He'd never want to stop."

"Canter him at the bank beyond," ordered Bill, with a wave of his hand.

Danny cantered the horse down with collected stride, and with a spring of his powerful quarters Broncho was across it. Round the further field he swung, back where the bank was bigger and the drop more sharp. And when he had again landed safely, Bill said to himself:

"Well, wherever he was bred, England or Ireland, he has it in him to leap them banks."

Danny jumped to the ground and slackened his girths. Proudly he walked the horse round.

"Meself an' himself," he declaimed, "'ll be winnin' a good race at the point-to-point." And his master, slowly shaking his head as he turned away, agreed that he "mightn't do too bad."

But his private opinion was more optimistic.

"He's class," he told himself, "and the young lad's right good." It might be that the horse would bring him in a bit of profit yet, he thought. Halting, he glanced round again to where Danny followed leading Broncho. "Have you any name on him?" he asked.

"Name?" repeated Danny. "I calls him 'the horse.' But he came from the army. Can't you call him the 'King's Treasure'?"

And so, sitting down at the kitchen table when he went in, Bill laboriously wrote out an entry in the Maiden Plate for Mr. William Foley's "King's Treasure."

"Class" certainly Broncho looked, as he walked soberly round in the parade ring, ready saddled upon the appointed day. The old quarter sheet, saffron with a deep blue border, that had gone racing on every horse of Bill Foley's since the day he had bought it to clothe "a smasher" more than twenty years before, emphasised the dark sheen of his coat. His head was held high. His eyes were wise and placid. And Danny, in the saffron and blue hoops that were Bill's colours, looked "a likely lad enough."

The starting bell rang. Through the crowd a heated official pushed his way. "Now then, jockeys! Time to get up!" Bill swept the quarter piece off the old horse and threw Danny into the saddle. Crouched above the lumps of lead he quietly made his way down to the post. And Bill, having watched him safely arrive there, turned quickly back to the bookmakers to invest his money. For his hopes were high and his plans were deep. The horse ought to win—and if so he would make his price and a bit more along with it. And so, with a silent secretiveness, he hurriedly "placed" his money here and there, at "sevens" and "eights"—and a pound at "tens" with a fellow he didn't quite like the look of! As he stuffed the tickets into his

pockets, he assured himself that he would be "made up" if the horse came home, and turned hurriedly up to the top of the hill to have a good view of the race.

Down came the starter's flag. Off streamed the field in a medley of moving colours. Bill singled Broncho out, striding evenly along at the head of the second division, Danny sitting very still in his saddle. They streamed down to the first fence. They crossed it in a strung-out line. They turned towards the second. Something in white, pulling hard, was forging its way ahead. A chestnut with a red jacket was following. Broncho was keeping his place.

All safely across the third! One down at the fourth! Yes, there was the horse, fifth and going easily, as they came in to the next fence! He watched him take off. He watched him spring on to the bank and over—watched Danny loose his head a little and let him draw nearer to the leaders across the succeeding field. Oh, thought Bill, it was a gift for him! He was a real good horse—and the young lad couldn't do better!

An open fence followed next. The horses jumped it and turned out of sight behind a hedge. Next they dropped into a stretch of plough, and jumped out of it across a narrow, stone-faced bank. In the further field the man in the white began to come back to them. But the chestnut with the red jacket continued to forge ahead.

Danny sat still, watching the leaders in front. They were almost halfway round, but he mustn't go up too close yet awhile! Gradually he eased his horse's head. Slowly Broncho crept forward. Fifth. . . . Fourth. . . . Third. . . . But the chestnut with the red jacket was still stealing further ahead. . . .

Halfway now! They turned round a flag and bent down towards the river. They streamed across it and raced up over a big grass field. Broncho was now second, but the red jacket was not coming back to him! And then another, a man in blue, crept slowly into view upon his right. Danny glanced uneasily round, and for the first time hit his horse. Under the stroke Broncho spurted ahead, but the

man in the blue drew steadily up again. At the next fence he was level. At the following one he was two lengths in front. Again Danny tried. Again Broncho responded—but, once more, to fail! His ears were pricked. Gallantly he strode forward. But carrying those lumps of lead across those "miles of fair hunting country" was very different from carrying Danny around the big field at home! Wind and muscle were not what they once had been. Broncho's racing days were over—and he knew it! Yet every time Danny urged him the horse did his best to respond to the call.

But as they jumped the hedge at the foot of the hill there were four others in front of him, and as they turned upwards towards the winning-post Danny had ceased to persevere. Fifth, Broncho passed the post, neglected by the crowd hurrying to get a glimpse of the winner.

Flushed, disappointed, Danny stammered his excuses as he loosened saddle and girths.

"He went grand with me for a long time. He was gaining at every jump. But after we'd gone through the plough he seemed to tire a bit. When I saw he couldn't win I didn't press him. But, shure, he'll go better the next time, sir!"

Bill shook his head. As he had stood silently watching the horse's distress it had been borne upon him, as fully as upon Broncho himself, that the horse's racing days were over. And soberly he had made up his mind to cut his losses.

"No use going on with that," he murmured. "I'll sell him for what I can get."

Danny looked round with dismay.

But if "the boss" was a just he was a hard man! And he knew that there would be little chance of a reprieve.

"Only wasting your time and my money," murmured Bill, his disappointment at length finding vent.

Broncho, beads of sweat upon his forehead, looked round as though he understood what was being said. Danny's cuff sought his

eye—to wipe away a tell-tale tear. And it was then that, suddenly, he heard a strange voice say:

"What's that? Number six! 'King's Treasure. . . .' Reminds me of a horse I had once. . . ."

But it was not Danny alone who heard that voice. It also reached Broncho's ears. And in his brain a chord of memory stirred. Once more he turned his head, looking round with pulsing nostrils. And suddenly, no more than a few yards from him, he caught sight of his long lost master. Moving a step forward, he whinnied a low breathless greeting.

"By Gad!" Roger exclaimed, "it can't be! But it is! My word! it's him. . . . He knows me, too! It's Broncho. . . .!" One hand went forward to the bridle, the other travelled quickly along the horse's shoulder. "Got the old scars and everything," he announced to his companion, his face flushed, his eyes alight. He bit his lip to stop its trembling. "Wherever have you been, Broncho, since you and I parted last?"

But beyond rubbing his head against that well-known shoulder Broncho was powerless to tell.

Bill Foley, however, a mystified look in his eyes, came forward to volunteer information.

"I got him from my brother, sir," he said, "and he bought him from a man who bought him from the army."

"He is a horse whom I had long ago," Roger explained.

"Quality horse," said Bill judicially. "In a very bad state when he came to me; but I let him run out for nearly a year, and I think he's all right again."

Roger nodded, looking slowly over at those well-remembered lines of neck and shoulder and loin and legs.

"I had him all through the War. He saved my life once, I know. I must have him back again. I suppose he's for sale?"

"To be sure, sir," said Bill.

"Take fifty pounds?"

Bill shook his head, and with a sharp glance tried to sum the other up.

"No, sir," he said. "He's worth more to me. It would have to be a hundred."

"A hundred!" But Roger felt that to him Broncho was beyond price! "I'm not a rich man, Mr. Foley . . ." he was beginning.

"Well, I tell you what I'll do with you, sir," Bill interrupted, afraid that the chance was "slipping," "being yours long ago and all that, I'll let you have him for seventy-five pounds."

Pleasures of Peace

Chapter the Eighteenth

ROGER had met Jack Fitzgibbon when they had both been prisoners in Germany, and his promise to visit Jack's home in Ireland had been one of long standing. But many things had intervened to make the visit impossible until long after their release. Yet at length there had come a letter from Jack: "You *must* try to manage it this spring. We'll be just in the midst of the point-to-points. And if you want a young horse you might find something to take back with you."

"Well, I do," Roger explained, when he arrived. "I've got nothing at all for next season. But I've got no money to spare—it'll have to be a green four-year-old. I'm farming on my own, you see, now."

And instead of a four-year-old for his seventy-five pounds he found himself bringing back Broncho. It meant farewell to all chance of making a profit—that would have to come out of the farm—for Broncho would never be up for sale again!

"It's most extraordinary," he explained to Jack's mother, "that I should have found him over here, just when I'd finally given up all hope. I'd done everything I could to trace him. I traced him, you know, to the base; and from that to the depot at home. . . . I met the fellow who'd been in charge of the draft he'd been sent with up to auction. I went to the auctioneers and they looked up their books. . . . Sold for ten guineas to a fellow named Pitcher. I found out where Pitcher lived and went there, too, but the villagers told me he'd left it more than a year before, and none of them knew where he'd gone to. And there was no getting further than that!"

"While all the time," said Mrs. Fitzgibbon, smiling, "Broncho 'd been here, close to us, and Jack had been trying to persuade you to

come over! He tells me he knew the horse quite well out hunting. Indeed, I think I remember hearing him talk about 'Bill Foley's big brown horse'!"

Roger laughed.

"Yes, isn't it extraordinary? And hasn't he—Broncho, I mean —been through a lot when you come to think of it? He's game still —right through. If you'd seen the way he struggled on in that race! Poor old man, I can't say how glad I am to have found him again."

"I can tell you," said Jack, smiling at them across the breakfast-table, "one person who's sorry, and that's Foley's boy, Danny Keogh. They tell me he was the only one whom the horse would let near him at Foley's."

"That's the freckled-faced youth?" inquired Mrs. Fitzgibbon. "Why, I saw him going round to the yard as I was coming down-stairs!"

Jack laughed.

"He's come to see you, Roger, I'll bet! You'll find yourself taking him back with you when you are taking Broncho!"

"Oh! I couldn't," said Roger seriously. "I've got Harry back again, you know."

"Well, I'll leave you to tell him so yourself," said Jack with a smile, "if we find him waiting out in the yard."

And, as he had foretold, when they came out there stood Danny waiting by the stable door. Diffidently he came forward as Roger approached, touching his ragged cap.

"It's the horse, sir," he began, in a voice that was little above a whisper.

"Well, what about him?" asked Roger. "You're leaving him over here this afternoon, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. . . ." A pause; and then, very humbly: "But I looked after him all the time he was down at Mr. Foley's. I'm terrible fond of him, sir. . . . There's not many that understands him. He's

more sense than many a Christian. . . . Do you think, when you're takin' him, you could take me, too, sir?"

Roger smiled. So it *was* that. But, of course, the idea was impossible! He had Harry to look after any horses that he might have.

"I don't think I could," he explained. "I've a very small place, and I have a man to look after the horses."

"But I could do anything," Danny assured him. "I wouldn't mind not being with the horse. It would be enough if I was somewhere where I'd see him sometimes."

Roger glanced down at the freckled face and wistful, pleading eyes. What could he do with the boy? And how Jack would laugh at him if he *did* surrender!

"But what about Mr. Foley?" he asked. "Doesn't he want you?"

"Ah, shure, sir," said Danny, "he could get another that 'ud suit him just as well."

"Well, then. . . ." And, besides, too, this youth would be *certain* to disagree with Harry! "Well, then," Roger heard himself saying, "would you mind the pigs and poultry for me if you came?"

"Oh yes, sir, yes," Danny agreed joyfully. Hadn't he done it at Foley's? And if he only got "over there" he could keep an eye on the horse!

"Where did you get that red-haired lad?" asked Sir Charles—an older Sir Charles now who noticeably walked with a stick—on the day that he came over to Roger's farm to see Broncho.

"Brought him from Ireland," Roger answered. "He begged me to, when I was taking the horse."

Sir Charles nodded.

"Delicate-looking boy. He seems to have a way with horses, though!"

"He was to mind the pigs and poultry," Roger explained, "and I can't say he doesn't. But I find him very often about the stables," he laughed. "Yet I must say," he added, "he's got a 'way' with

most people. I was afraid there might be trouble with Harry, but, instead, they're as thick as two thieves."

And thereupon, to Sir Charles and "Aunt Isabel," Roger related such details of Broncho's later story as he had gleaned—of the slow recovery of the horse's confidence, of the slow rebuilding of his strength, amid the peaceful surroundings of Foley's farm, of the pocketfuls of oats filched for him from the cows' feeding, of the summer evenings by the river-bank when Danny and he made greater and greater friends.

"What are you going to do with him now?" Sir Charles asked.

"Hunt him round the winter," answered Roger—"that is, if he'll stand."

"Stand well enough," nodded the elder man, glancing down at Broncho's legs. "But he'll take up the place of a youngster, Roger, of something you might be making money on."

"But I must keep him," Roger explained. "I don't want to lose him now—after all the years we've been together."

Sir Charles nodded again.

"Oh no! Oh no! But I tell you what you'll do—send him over to me. I haven't forgotten the day he saved the pack for me. There'll be a home for him in the park."

But Roger shook his head.

"I think Broncho'd like a bit more hunting, too," he answered.

All that long summer Broncho spent in lazy luxuriance, grazing in the orchard beneath the shade of the gnarled apple-trees. And as autumn came Danny came whistling down one morning to the orchard, as he had come the previous autumn whistling down to Bill Foley's "bog."

"Time's up," he explained, as Broncho thrust his nose into the halter. "There's many a good day before you now. But this time you'll be carryin' the Captain—and there'll be divil a day for meself!"

Broncho, munching his oats, nodded a wise agreement.

"Still," admitted Danny, "both yourself and meself's better off than we was with Bill Foley."

It was the truth. But it was only to himself that Danny admitted it. To Harry—and the farm men when they looked into the saddle-room in the evenings—"Mr. Foley's, where meself and the horse came from," was a place of many pretensions.

"Would he turn out many horses, now?" Harry inquired one evening.

"A few, not many," Danny answered guardedly. "But they'd all have to be good ones. There was two he had the year before last, and they both ran in the Grand National."

Danny puffed at his cigarette. He was careful not to divulge that it had been years before they reached Bill Foley's that they had run, and that he himself had condemned them upon their arrival there as not having "three legs between the two of them!"

"It's a harder country for a horse," he continued, glancing round at his audience, "than this is. A horse that 'ud lep it, he'd have no trouble over here. And a horse from here"—with grimy hands he made a quick, contemptuous gesture—"he'd have his neck broke before he'd got a mile."

Harry nodded in sage agreement.

"Still, the master told me that Broncho jumped it all all right?"

"Oh, him!" said Danny. "Oh, he'd jump anything! Neither wall nor bank nor hedge's no trouble to him. He'll look at what's before him as careful as yourself. Many a time I took him out when the boss was away, and we'd jump the gates and walls and poles he had for training the horses for the show. He'd win a prize at it."

"So he might," agreed Harry, "but I don't know if the Captain 'ud let him go."

But secretly Danny had determined, when an opportunity arrived, to put that question to the test. All that winter Broncho had carried his master to hounds as proudly as he had that long ago day carried him across the Meadsbrook. He had seemed to enjoy his hunting just

as Roger had prophesied, far preferring it to that life of ease in the park which Sir Charles had offered. He was far from a spent force yet—so far, indeed, that as spring drew near Roger's thoughts began to run towards the point-to-points. Yet would it be fair to Broncho to ask him to try again?

Long Roger pondered the question, and at length, one day in the stable, he found himself speaking his thoughts aloud.

"I'd be against it, sir," said Danny, glancing sharply up. "I rode him in the last one meself. And when I came in Mr. Foley said to me—and a more knowledgeable man about a horse you wouldn't find, sir!—'That horse's racin' days are over,' says he. And I think that that's no more than the truth, sir."

"I think so myself," Roger agreed. "And I don't want to be hard on him."

"But do you know, sir," continued Danny, "he'd win you anything you asked him to, jumping in a show."

"Turn Broncho into a show jumper!" Roger exclaimed.

"There'd be no turnin'," Danny explained. "I used to jump him across all sorts of things at Mr. Foley's. Put a few hurdles and bars up in the paddock, sir, and I'll show you what he can do."

Next morning the hurdles were erected. Roger, with secret misgivings, gave Danny a leg up on to Broncho's back. And the latter, gripping his thin knees to the saddle, bent down and whispered to the horse:

"Now show them what I taught you, old son!"

Broncho nodded his head as he walked into the paddock. Obedient to the light hand upon his mouth he started off into a canter at Danny's urge. The latter wheeled him round, turned him at the hurdle. With a collected stride he was over it and cantering upon the further side. The boy dropped his hands. The horse steadied down to a trot. Again Danny turned him at the hurdle. Again Broncho glided across. A third time . . . and then Danny came cantering back to Roger.

"What do you think of that, sir? What do you think of that?"

Harry, hurrying across the paddock, put the whitewashed bar up on its rests.

"Come along, Danny!"

Danny nodded, and, easing Broncho's head, urged him into his stride. The horse flew over. A second time. . . . And a third. . . . Harry raised the bar higher and higher. Every time Broncho cleared it with collected stride.

At length Danny came cantering back. Slipping his feet from the stirrups he jumped to the ground.

"Try him over them yourself, sir. He's as gentle about it as a lamb."

Roger tried—again and again. Over each time with one collected bound, then, reins slack upon his shoulder, of his own accord the horse steadied down to a trot. Roger, patting his shoulder, smiled a mystified smile. Broncho was no less Broncho than ever he had been. There was the same certainty, the same sweeping stride, the same powerful spring. But where was the old impetuosity? By what wizardry had that freckle-faced lad won the horse's confidence so very deeply? Still smiling, Roger rode quietly back. It seemed as though a new field of adventure stretched out before him!

"And he'd jump a wall, if we had one, sir, or a bank," Danny eagerly explained. "He'd jump anything ever you wanted him to. And if he knows you don't want to go fast he'll go slow. He'll win at every show that you take him to!"

A Public Performer

Chapter the Nineteenth

IT was on the afternoon of the local agricultural show—fine, mid-May weather, with a band blaring in the corner behind the tent wherein the flower show was held, and the turnstile clicking as the crowd passed steadily into the jumping enclosure—that Sir Charles came stumping heavily along the length of the Grand Stand to where Lady Carrington was seated in one of the places of honour. He was wearing his light grey flannel suit—sure sign, his daughter said, that summer at last had come—and upon its coat lapel fluttered the scarlet ribbon that denoted his presidency of the society. But his wife, watching him come, noted that he was also, beneath his white moustache, wearing an expression that suggested that the world was not going too well with him.

He glanced up as he came to the centre of the stand.

"Ah!" he said, nodding up to her, "there you are!"

And when he had clambered up beside her he turned and gave voice to the news which was worrying him.

"Do you know what, my dear?" he said in a deep whisper. "Roger's got Broncho here for the jumping competition!"

"Broncho!" Lady Carrington raised her mild eyebrows in surprise.

And Marjorie, looking very demure in her white summer frock, hastily repressed a smile. She had been down more than once in the mornings to Roger's when Broncho had been having his schools. But she had not said anything to her mother about it, since, she argued, she "might forget, and tell father," and, as she had explained to Roger, it would be better that "father" should not know because "he would only become wild." And so, as very often before, it was now left to Lady Carrington to bear the brunt of Sir Charles' "wildness."

"Broncho!" she repeated, while she hesitated for something else to say.

"Yes, Broncho," said Sir Charles fiercely. "I call it a shame to go knocking the old horse about in such a way!"

"But perhaps, Charles, he may do well." She nodded her head to emphasise her hopes, so that the rose in her hat faintly trembled.

"Couldn't!" said Sir Charles. "You're talking rubbish, my dear. I call it most foolish and inconsiderate of Roger to bring him here."

Marjorie, upon her mother's other side, stretched forth her hand for the programme.

"Darling?" said Lady Carrington vaguely.

"The programme, please, mummie. Here is the first of them coming out." Glancing down sideways, she read: "Mr. Swanwick's 'White Daisy.'"

"Swanwick!" said Sir Charles, catching at the name. "Nowadays you've got fellows like that coming here! He wins prizes all over the country. That's the sort of thing old Broncho 'll be up against! Criminal madness, I call it!"

Mr. Swanwick's "White Daisy," a dock-tailed grey cob, curveted behind the starter's flag. At length he dropped it, and the small boy in the saddle loosed his mount's head. With the collected impetuosity of her type she strode down at the first fence, the small boy sitting white-faced and still. . . . Over it! On to the wall. . . . Over! On to the stile. . . . Over! Round to the "in and out." . . . Over again! On to the three bars. . . . Over a fifth time! On to the final hurdle. . . . Over! And, propping hurriedly as she reached the gate of the jumping pocket, the grey cob disappeared out of sight.

From the Grand Stand came a burst of applause. From force of habit Lady Carrington joined mildly.

"Now that," said Sir Charles, looking down with disapproval at her small gloved hands, "is what Roger's bringing that unfortunate old horse out against! Professionalism—that's all pure professionalism, my dear! Has him here all day, knocking about in the heat and

the noise of that band! Expects him to come and jump these vile contraptions! A highly strung horse, he's sure to be upset by it! And he might be out resting at this moment in the park! I offered him the summer's grass, but the fool hadn't the sense to accept it."

Roger's own fear, too, had been that the horse might get upset. But as Broncho waited, with Danny at his head, amid the dust and noise of the jumping pocket, he seemed to be placidity itself. Danny was stroking his muzzle and whispering soft nothings into his ear. And Harry was there, too, standing by with an air of confidence. Of them all, Roger felt, he himself was the most nervous of the coming ordeal.

Number Two went out and came in again—a poor round! Number Three—three faults for a brick off the wall and one for a refusal. Number Four came next. Again there followed applause. Another perfect round. Again—to quote Sir Charles—"pure professionalism!"

Number Five. . . . And Number Six. . . . A girl in a white coat upon Number Seven, a skewbald pony. Only half a fault! The skewbald was left in again. And then Broncho's number appeared on the board, and Roger jumped into the saddle.

Sedately the old horse walked out into the enclosure. With head erect he gazed round at the serried rows of faces that filled the stand. The starter nodded to Roger. "Ready? Go!" And, mechanically, Roger urged Broncho into a canter.

With even, collected stride the horse approached the first fence. . . . Over! On to the wall. . . . Over again! On to the stile. . . . Not so much as even a slip moved! Round by the turning-post. . . . Roger became conscious once again of that sea of faces, of the fences, very high and white, amid their setting of green turf, and of Broncho's keen, pointed ears. . . .

Round to the "in and out." . . . In . . . out . . . safely over! On to the triple bars. . . . Over, with a spring! On to the final hurdle. . . . Over safely once again! Another perfect round!

The Triple Bar

The judges, in the privacy of their box, decided that it looked like being as good a competition as they had had there for years. The Grand Stand clapped enthusiastically. Lady Carrington did so till she had split her glove, but in her excitement took no notice of the fact. Marjorie studied the programme with shining eyes. And Sir Charles, his mouth very grim, looked down in constrained silence at his boots!

Steadily onward through the programme the competition wended its way. The band continued to blare from behind the flower tent. In the galvanised shed that had its back to the road the poultry continued to cackle. By the entrance to the jumping enclosure the programme sellers continued to call their wares, and at the back of the stand the caterers heatedly made the final preparations for "tea."

But, though the hour crept on, few amongst the audience gave much thought to it. They would wait and see the competition to its end. Eight horses were left in the second round—Numbers One, Four, Seven, Eight (Broncho), Eleven (a big bay with a tube), Fifteen (a roan), Twenty-two (a chestnut with white stockings, belonging to a soldier), Twenty-three (a bay mare ridden by a girl).

Number One remained in and Number Seven.

Again came Broncho's turn. Again Lady Carrington and Sir Charles and Marjorie watched with steadfast eyes. Again, at the starter's nod, Roger motioned him into a canter. Again he swung down at the first fence with collected stride. Again a burst of applause broke out as he disappeared into the pocket. Again the judges soberly marked down another perfect round.

The third round came. Four of them were still left. Number One (the grey cob), Number Seven (the skewbald), Number Eight (Broncho), Number Twenty-two (the white-stockinged chestnut).

The grey dashed off with her customary impatience, the small boy sitting tense and white-faced in the saddle. Over the first! Over the second! Over the third! Round at the "in and out"—over! thought the crowd. But, no! There came a crash. The grey had got in too

close. One white bar went flying across the turf. The black flag of rejection was signalled.

The girl in the white coat on the skewbald came next. With graceful poise the pony swung down at the fence.

"Professional!" muttered Sir Charles to his moustache. "She's a professional—must be!" And his keen eyes watched the pony jumping faultlessly round. Faultlessly—up to the last. But the hurdle seemed to sway ever so gently as the skewbald landed over it and sped on. And in their books the judges recorded "One fault—touched with one hind-leg."

Again Broncho came. Again he looked about him with wise eyes. Again, at the starter's nod, he strode forward. Again, with collected stride, he cleared obstacle after obstacle, to achieve a faultless round. Then came the soldier's turn. The white-stockinged chestnut in the bearing-rein went faultlessly round; the cavalry subaltern, suppling in his saddle, glanced back with satisfaction as the hurdle passed untouched behind.

A stillness fell upon the audience. What would be the result? And through it came the booming tones of the announcer's megaphone. "Numbers Eight and Twenty-two will jump again for the first prize."

Again Sir Charles and Lady Carrington and Marjorie, speechless with excitement, watched Broncho emerge into the ring, watched him jump fence after fence without hesitation, achieving yet another perfect round. Again the audience broke into a wave of applause. Again the soldier came forth upon the chestnut.

Over the first! Over the second! On to the wall. . . . But that quick jumping was just a shade too flippant, and Marjorie's quick eyes thought they had seen a slip skim from the top as the chestnut passed on. Then came a deep murmur from the audience, confirming her hopes. The judges marked half a fault down to the chestnut, and decided that Broncho had won.

Again came the boom from the megaphone. Again a silence fell.

And through it came the announcer's voice, "First, Number Eight. Second Number Twenty-two. Third, Number Seven. Fourth, Number One," as the four placed horses came cantering up to the stand.

A wild burst of applause broke forth. Marjorie tramped upon the footboards. Lady Carrington clapped until her hands felt sore.

"First, Number Eight," repeated the announcer. "Second, Number Twenty-two."

And in the pause that ensued Sir Charles, stumping down to award the rosettes, sought to give a final expression to his feelings.

"Well, I'm d——!" he began loudly.

"Ssh!" murmured Lady Carrington, who was following behind.

Triumph!

Chapter the Twentieth

MR. SWANWICK'S was a most objectionable personality. So, at least, Roger thought. And as, one June afternoon, he saw the dealer's car for the fourth time turn into his yard, and Mr. Swanwick himself, tall and rubicund, emerge, his thought was: "I almost wish I could tell the police to keep this man away!" For Mr. Swanwick would take no denial. He wanted to buy Broncho. And ever since the agricultural show he had given Roger no peace.

It had begun on the day itself.

"Well, young man!" Mr. Swanwick had called, loud-voiced, florid-faced, as, back in the jumping pocket, Roger had slipped down from Broncho's back. "That's not a bad sort of old horse you've got. You'd sell him, of course. I'll give you a hundred pounds."

Roger had shaken his head.

Mr. Swanwick had laughed at him—loudly. What a joke it was to hear anyone refusing such a good offer for such an old horse!

"Oh, well, think it over. I'll come round your way in two or three days."

And so he had.

"You're letting me have that old horse, young man?"

"Didn't I tell you I wouldn't sell him?" said Roger.

"What are you doing here?" continued Mr. Swanwick, with apparent irrelevance, glancing round the yard. "Farming? Not much, these days, *in* farming. Don't miss a good opportunity when it comes to you. I'll stand word and give you that hundred pounds."

"But I don't want to sell the horse, Mr. Swanwick."

Mr. Swanwick, hands in his trousers pockets, threw back his head and laughed loud.

"What do you want—another fifty? I won't give you that, but I'll give you twenty-five."

"I don't want to sell the horse," repeated Roger, "and I won't."

For the moment Mr. Swanwick had looked nonplussed. Then, jingling the change in his trousers pockets, he turned back towards his car.

"Well, I'll call round again one day next week. And by that time I hope you'll have met someone to talk you into sense, young man!"

The next week he had called again—and the week after. The first time he advanced his offer for Broncho to one hundred and fifty pounds, the second time to one hundred and seventy-five. But Roger was steadfast in his refusal to sell, and to try and make the other realise it he had almost been rude. But rudeness did not seem to have any effect upon Mr. Swanwick. And now, for the fourth time, he came striding across the yard to meet Roger, as imperturbable as ever.

"Hullo! Hullo!" he began. "Here we are again! Changed your mind this time, I expect! You're going to let me have that old horse?"

"No, I'm not," answered Roger shortly.

"Come, come, young man! You're getting a very good chance."

"I don't want it," said Roger. "I don't want to sell the horse."

"Then what are you going to do with him?" asked Mr. Swanwick.

"I'm going to jump him at Olympia," announced Roger.

"Olympia!" It was the best joke he had ever heard! "Olympia!" repeated Mr. Swanwick, laughing until the tears came into his eyes. "Olympia! Young man, young man, you'll be the death of me! Take that old horse up to Olympia! Oh, help!"

Yet what did Swanwick want the horse for? Roger asked himself, even in the midst of his anger. Swanwick was the biggest dealer in show jumpers in the country. If he didn't think Broncho had it in him to jump he wouldn't want to buy him at all.

"Olympia!" Mr. Swanwick repeated, for the fourth time. "Oh dear! Oh dear!"

And at that moment, as he listened to the big dealer's derisive gurgles, Roger felt that it was rather a foolhardy scheme. Olympia would be trying both himself and Broncho very high. But in the excitement of the moment that day at the agricultural show, as he had fastened Broncho's rosette into his forehead band and Marjorie had come whispering into his ear, "Do send him up to Olympia; he's sure to do awfully well, and I'll make dad bring us all up to town," the adventure had been decided upon. And never once, in his preparation, had Broncho given the least cause for anxiety. Twice a week Roger had taken him down to the neighbouring barracks, and there they practised together over such obstacles as they would have to meet. The barrack Adjutant, a keen horseman, was enthusiastic about Roger's chance.

"That's a first-rate old horse. He's a perfect jumper—far better than anything we've got here. The marvel is, for so highly strung a horse, that he takes it all so placidly. Confidence in you, I expect—a great deal of it. That's the rare combination that we're all always hoping to bring off."

But here, in the face of Mr. Swanwick's derision, it looked a very different proposition.

"Now sell him to me," Mr. Swanwick went on. "It's the last offer you'll ever get. I wouldn't trouble about the horse—and as a matter of fact I don't myself like him!—but a customer of mine's taken a fancy to him."

Silently Roger shook his head.

"You're an impossible young man," said Mr. Swanwick.

"But I told you from the very beginning, Mr. Swanwick, that I didn't want to sell the horse—and I won't."

"Well, I tell you straight now, young man, that I won't come back any more to you!"

"I don't want you to," said Roger. "As a matter of fact, you're only taking up my time."

"Your time!" Mr. Swanwick threw back his head, as though he

were going to laugh—but he didn't. Instead the colour of his rubicund face grew deeper, and he made a funny sound through his nose. "Taking up your time! I like that, young man! I like that!" Did the young fellow realise who he was, he wondered—he who "put more horses through his hands than almost any other man"? "But, well—you're young and inexperienced, and you're too cocksure by half. And I can tell you one thing further, if you want to know! Your old horse won't win at Olympia. I'll lay you fifty to one that he don't."

Roger put his hand into his pocket. He found there a single pound note.

"Well, here you are, Mr. Swanwick," he said quietly. "And if I win I'll come to you for my fifty pounds."

Mr. Swanwick drew back a step. He seemed about to declare the offer off. But, glancing up, he met Roger's quiet smile, and thrusting the note into his pocket he said sullenly:

"Right! I'll remember. And so that's that."

Then he turned abruptly back to his car, leaving Roger standing behind in uncertainty.

To have bet Swanwick he'd win at Olympia . . .! But at any rate his pound would be well spent if it kept the dealer from troubling him any more!

From Broncho's stable, in a quiet mews not very far from the show ground, one could hear the dull roar of Hammersmith Broadway, but that did not seem to worry the horse at all. Danny was far more excited at being in London. He had never been there before. And the greatness of the city caused his country eyes to open wide in astonishment—not that he would have been prepared to admit its being outside his previous experience, or, indeed, very much more awe-inspiring than "Mr. Foley's, where meself and the horse came from."

And for the two days previous to the competition he had been in

his element. At all hours he held forth upon the glories of Broncho and his master to the chauffeurs congregated in the mews. And when, upon the second afternoon, who should turn up but Mr. Swanwick, his satisfaction knew no bounds. For Mr. Swanwick was well known in the locality. Yearly his string of jumpers were stabled just round the corner from where Broncho now lodged. Yearly his broad figure and flushed face might be seen driving about in the limousine of one or other of his millionaire patrons. "Here's Swanwick!" the chauffeurs said with one breath as the big figure in the loud checks came striding round the corner of the mews.

"Come to try and see our horse, I expect," said Danny nonchalantly.

"Your horse?" queried the others.

"Yes. Our horse. But he won't!"

The chauffeurs looked the surprise they felt.

"He's mad to buy him," continued Danny, his back still turned to the approaching Swanwick, "but the Captain, he won't sell."

The chauffeurs grinned incredulously. But, as they used to tell one another when Danny was not there, "the youngster used never draw the long bow—oh, not half!"

"No, he won't," Danny assured them. "We don't want old Swanwick at all."

It is probable that "old" Swanwick heard that assertion, for the next moment his "Hi! there, you boy!" came sharply to Danny's ears.

Danny turned, meekly touching his cap.

"You're Captain Arbuthnot's lad, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Danny.

"Well, I want to have a look at his old horse."

"I'm afraid you can't, sir," answered Danny.

"Can't!" Swanwick paused. "What do you mean?"

"You can't see him, sir," Danny repeated quietly. "The Captain's orders. I wasn't to show him to anybody unless he was there himself."

"But I—I——" Mr. Swanwick began to bluster. "I've got a very good customer. I'm certain if Captain Arbuthnot were here he'd let me see the horse."

"Just so, sir," agreed Danny. "But I'm afraid I can't now."

"Look here, boy," said Swanwick, and coming a step closer he sought to drop a half-crown covertly into Danny's palm, "I must just see this horse."

"I'm obliged to you, sir," answered Danny, drawing his hand away within full sight of the chauffeurs, "but you can keep your money, sir. I know my orders about the horse."

And with that Mr. Swanwick turned on his heel and strode off round the corner with heightened colour, while Danny glanced back at the amazed chauffeurs with a grin.

Roger caught sight of Swanwick again the following evening as he rode Broncho round the jumping pocket, waiting for the competition to begin, and beside Swanwick was a small, dark man who might have been one of his patrons. But whether or no the latter was one of those millionaires to whom Swanwick sold his jumpers at such prices, Roger did not worry. His thoughts were given rather to what chance he had of winning his wager. Swanwick seemed to have taken every precaution that he could. There were no less than half a dozen of his horses entered in the competition, amongst them Moonshine and Magical Melody and Lady in Waiting, three of his very best. And as Roger watched them walking round the ring he felt that Broncho and he had but a very slender chance.

But at that moment there came a voice from the ring-side to hearten him. It was that of the barrack Adjutant, up to the show for the day.

"Just keep as cool as you can," he advised, "and leave the horse alone. He'll do far better than you expect, you'll see."

And then, just beyond where the Adjutant was standing, Roger caught sight of Sir Charles' grey moustache, and Marjorie's smile, and Lady Carrington's best hat with its nodding flowers.

"We're going up to our seats now," the latter murmured, as he rode on. "We only came to wish you good luck."

And a feeling came to Roger that since they were all there he must do his best to do them credit.

The coach horns sounded. The great gates opened wide. The first competitor entered the arena. The competition began. . . . One by one the numbers flashed upon the board. Every now and again the silence was broken by a burst of clapping. At last came Broncho's turn.

Roger, his heart throbbing loud, rode into the arena. Right round ran a sea of faces, up to the very roof. Edging the turf was a bright border of geraniums and lobelia. In the centre were massed banks of pink and white hydrangeas, and against the brown of the peat moss underfoot the obstacles stood white and high.

Roger glanced at them with a none too confident eye. Broncho noted them, too, with head held erect. With a nod from the starter came the word to go. Roger loosed his horse's head, and Broncho cantered down towards the first fence. Over it, in one collected bound! On, with steady stride to the next. . . . Over again! Round, right-handed, and on to the next. . . . Over the wall! Over the oxer! . . . Turn again and over the stile! On to the rail and fence. . . . Over! Round, and over the gates! The huge arena doors swung open. Broncho disappeared to a clapping of hands. With a pat on his horse's shoulder, Roger jumped off and hurried over to learn his markings. Only half a fault! He was to jump again!

The second round came. In Roger's heart there was now a glow of pride. Broncho had exceeded his wildest hopes. Never had he thought that the horse would have been so collected, would have jumped so very well! Even if he were to fail now he had at least shown Mr. Swanwick that he had not been "too inexperienced and cocksure by half." He saw the latter standing by the ring-side, but the big man never as much as glanced in his direction, though his companion, the small, dark man, seemed to have his eye on Broncho.

Olympia

Among the twelve competitors who were left in the second round were Swanwick's three best.

The first of the latter to have its number signalled was Magical Melody. Roger watched her trot evenly into the ring. Round she went, gliding over fence after fence with easy perfection. Back she came again. Only half a fault!

One after another the others went out and returned. At length Broncho's number was signalled a second time upon the board. Again Roger rode forth, his heart beating fast. Again his confidence returned in full as, at the starter's nod, Broncho strode collectedly off.

Over the bars! Over the brush fence! Round and over the wall. . . . Over the oxer! Over the stile! Over the gates! . . . Back again. "Slip off the wall," signalled the judges. Only half a fault!

Round went the others. Lady in Waiting took down a bar. Moonshine went too fast at the end of her round and hit the railway gates. Only three were signalled for the third round—Broncho, and Magical Melody, and a grey named Jack-in-the-Box.

Jack-in-the-Box went over first. Collectedly he started off. Over the bars! Over the brush fence! Over the wall! But as he came to the oxer his rider ever so slightly changed his hands. The grey took a short stride too many. With a lift of his rounded quarters he tried to clear the obstacle. But he was in too close; a fore-leg touched the rail and it went crashing to the ground. . . . Exit Jack-in-the-Box! Broncho and Magical Melody were left.

Broncho's number came up on the board. Once more the great gates swung back and he faced the waiting crowd. Once more the starter nodded. Once more Roger eased his head and he started off.

Over the first! Over the second! Round and over the third! Over the wall! Over the oxer! Over—— Ah! a gasp from the crowd. There was a slip off the top of the fence! Round once again—but with half a fault! There seemed to be the suspicion of a smile upon Mr. Swanwick's face as he led Magical Melody forth again.

She was the acknowledged best of his string. Her rider was his

paid professional. It seemed obvious that she would win. And if she did he knew he could sell her to the rich American who had been wanting to buy Broncho!

Off she started, with her beautiful, easy stride. Down she came to the bars. Over perfectly! Over the brush fence! Round and over the wall! But even as she seemed to clear it a slip dropped softly to the ground. Round with the loss of half a mark! They must both jump for the prize again!

Off Broncho started. Roger was no longer nervous now. He was now conscious of little save the desire to win. Gone was the sea of watching faces. Gone were the massed banks of flowers. Nothing seemed left save the high, white-painted obstacles in front of him and Broncho's wise, pricked ears. Over! Over! . . . Round! . . . Over again! Over again! . . . Round! . . . Over! . . . Over the last time—and back through the great gates that opened to receive him, while the crowd clapped wildly for a perfect round.

There was no smile upon Mr. Swanwick's face as he led Magical Melody forth once again. It seemed now as though Broncho was going to beat him! It seemed as though he would lose his fifty pounds! But Magical Melody was game. Gallantly she responded to her owner's need. Over! . . . Over! . . . Over! . . . And finally in again for another perfect round!

The two were equal. They must both jump once again!

At a word from the judges the attendants hurried forth. The obstacles were raised. But Broncho seemed to know. Over! . . . And over! . . . And over again—for yet another perfect round!

Again applause broke out wildly all round the arena. Again it died away only as Magical Melody appeared. Again she started off upon her round, and again her perfect stride drew every eye. Over the bars! . . . Over the brush! . . . Round and over the wall! Over the oxer! Over the stile! And so on to the rail and fence. Ov—e—? But Swanwick's shrewd eye, watching closely, knew that she had come in an inch too near; knew that nothing save a miracle

would prevent the top bar from dropping to the ground; knew, even before he saw it fall, that it must come; knew, too, even before that deep murmur broke forth from the expectant crowd, that he was beaten and that Broncho had won!

"Half a fault!" announced the judges. "First—Number Three Hundred and Thirty."

A wild storm of applause broke forth. And Roger rode into the arena once again amid a deafening clapping of hands. Broncho, with neck arched to his bit, cantered proudly down, turning, at his master's behest, to face the Royal Box, while the clapping broke out anew. And then, for the first time, Roger realised that Royalty had been present. A slim figure descended the red carpet amid the officials. The next moment Roger was being awarded his rosette, and a slim, strong hand was shaking his and offering congratulations.

Then somebody whispered something in Royalty's ear, and a friendly voice came up to Roger amid the bursts of applause from the crowd:

"I believe you've had this horse of yours since the old days? Well, my advice is, never let him go! A good one isn't any too easy to find."

They sang, those friendly words, that steady voice, in Roger's brain as he rode out again; and were still singing as the great gates closed behind him and he slipped down from Broncho's back. But he had scarcely reached the ground before a hand touched his elbow, and, turning round, he saw the dark stranger who had been with Swanwick by the ring-side.

"Say, sir," the latter asked, in accents that were obviously American, "I want you to sell me that horse? I'll give you all that I told Swanwick to go to for him—an even thousand pounds! Now, say that you'll sell him?"

"Never!" said Roger proudly, "as long as I live!"

THE END

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